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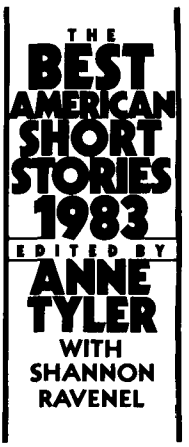

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Letter from London

DEAR H,

London has been half-intoxicated lately by the exhibition of 16th-century Venetian painting at the Royal Academy. One art critic, Lawrence Gowing, said: "Day after day I find an excuse to be in Piccadilly and once there give up any attempt to stay out of the galleries at the Royal Academy. Venetian art of the 16th century is running in one's head like music . . ."

The long line of amazing Titians naturally dominated the show, with their perfect balance of intellectual precision and sensuous richness. Even a 12-year-old boy, Ranuccio Farnese, the grandson of Pope Paul III, added to the mosaic of splendour with his lustrous eyes, gold-tinted skin and tunic of gleaming crimsom. The spirit haunting the high rooms was that of Giorgione. He was not represented, because the few works that are attributed to him were not available for lending; but, working at the very beginning of the century, he was the first source of all these glorious, expressive tones, as visitors to the Accademia in Venice will know. Two painters that were a revelation to Londoners were both from Bergamo, on the mainland or *terrafirma*: Cariani and Moroni. Both of them are subtly naturalistic, but their canvases are also dense with beautiful implicit feeling—most notably of all in Moroni's painting, said to be of *Titian's Schoolmaster*.

One painting, however, excited more attention than any of the others—even inspiring a leader in *The Times*, and some subsequent correspondence. This was the enormous late painting by Titian called *The Flaying of Marsyas*. "Video nasties," said *The Times*,

> don't come any nastier. A naked long-haired boy with a girlish face is kneeling down and with a sharp knife stripping the skin from a helpless half-human figure hung like a butcher's carcass upside down from a tree. The boy is working almost tenderly, thrusting his calm face close to his victim, but the blood streams down to the ground, where a grotesquely diminutive lapdog eagerly licks it up. Titian's *Flaying of Marsyas*, perhaps the rarest and most wonderful of innumerable rare and wonderful paintings assembled in the Royal Academy's great Venetian exhibition, has a subject which is almost intolerably cruel, and conveys it with a most vehement ferocity.

The story behind the picture is that the satyr Marsyas challenged Apollo to a music contest, with Marsyas playing his rustic pipes and the god playing his lyre. The outcome was what you could expect in that pre-television age, and Apollo had Marsyas stripped of his skin

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Titian
Portrait of Ranuccio Farnese as a Knight of Malta
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Photograph courtesy of the gallery.

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as a revenge for the insult. (Apollo is no doubt the boy with the knife in the picture).

But *The Times* pointed out, correctly, that for the Renaissance there was a deeper meaning in the scene. The clue is in Dante, who before he began the description of Paradise, invoked the help of Apollo—or at any rate of God through Apollo:

> Come into my heart, and so breathe
> As you did when you extracted Marsyas
> From the skin in which his limbs were enclosed.

Marsyas's suffering thus comes to represent the suffering of the artist as he exposes himself to the divine possession or inspiration through which he will successfully achieve his aim and create his art. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, until recently professor of Greek at Oxford, came into the *Times* correspondence with an apt quotation from Edgar Wind's famous book, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*: "The cruelty inflicted on Marsyas by Apollo expresses the supreme sense of disproportion by which the god attacks the human frame, which is agonised as it succumbs to the divine ecstasy." And the Bishop of Warwick wrenched the subject back to its Christian aspect by quoting, in another letter, the very similar words of Teilhard de Chardin as he contemplated his death:

> At that last moment when I feel I am losing hold of myself . . . O God, grant that I may understand that it is You (provided only my faith is strong enough) who are painfully parting the fibres of my being in order to penetrate to the very marrow of my substance . . .

Certainly, as one stood in front of the painting, one's first feeling of shock did slowly give way to a more absorbed contemplation of it. Turning one's head upside down to look into Marsyas's staring eyes, one saw that their expression was not one of agony, but something more like astonishment and awe. Details like the little lap dog with its bright, feathery tail, continued to batter at one's nerves somewhat. But even here the mood of life-in-death got a foothold; and the grandeur and beauty of the painting, and with it the very appropriate sense of reward for the pain one had been forced to share in, steadily began to prevail. Perhaps the painting was—something to please the deconstructionists, here—partly about the way it had itself come to be painted, with Titian identifying himself very closely with the figure of Marsyas. This is the first time in 300 years that the painting has been seen outside the Czech monastery that owns it. I think Americans should do all they can to get such a superb and mysterious work exhibited in the States.

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Titian
The Flaying of Marsyas
The Statný Zámek, Kromeriz, Czechoslovakia.
Photo courtesy of The Royal Academy of Arts.

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The British are going back to Brittany. Well, for holidays, at least. Brittany, the far North-West corner of France, has been prospering in recent years, and many of the farms along the Channel and Atlantic coasts now have a white villa sitting in a corner of a field that has been turned into a garden, fenced off by broom and pines. French people do stay in these villas of course; but most of them seem to be angled at the British, and let through specialised British agencies. It's an attractive prospect for a London family. To rent a villa like this for a fortnight, say, costs only a little more than to rent a farm cottage in Devon or Cornwall for the same period. There's the cross-channel ferry to be added on top of that, it's true, about £200 for car and a family of four. But good cheese and charcuterie and, above all, wines are much cheaper in France than in Britain; so at comparatively little cost you can have an excellent holiday such as you'd never get in the west of England, sitting in the newly-made garden with your Brie and pâté and Muscadet.

Coming out of Cherbourg after the ferry docks, you grind slowly along with hundreds of other GB plates. But the convoy slowly fans out, and soon you're a lone Brit among the lorries and the Renaults on the French country roads, hoping you'll keep remembering to drive on the right. Nor are you very likely to see many fellow-countrymen in the course of your stay. They're widely dispersed in their villas, and there are hundreds of beaches. Plenty of French people on those—and first shock for the British families is to find most of the young married Frenchwomen bathing topless. But at 12 o'clock the entire French contingent rises, clothes itself, and goes off to its hotels or tents for lunch. When the sand has settled, the Brits see each other—little nuclear-family clumps still lying there, left alone with the seagulls, their voices ringing out for hundreds of yards in the silence. Lunch is at 1 o'clock for them.

I sometimes think France has become the garden of England. The English countryside is still very beautiful, but through the modernisation of arable farming and the use of pesticides, it has lost many flowers and butterflies. In Brittany—which is like a gigantic reclaimed moor, with the hedges still full of moorland bracken—the farming is still mainly subsistence farming, often of quite a primitive kind. Our villa was on a farm owned by a very old Breton couple. They lived mainly by selling the calves produced by three enormous cows who lived in a barn attached to the small farmhouse. Their few fields were mostly used for growing fodder for the cows, and their personal vegetable beds were strips along the edge of the fields. We got home one night to find that the old lady had left eight beautiful, newly-cut artichokes on the doorstep for us. She always wore black; her husband, when he was out in the fields, still wore wooden clogs filled with straw.

One consequence of this is that wild flowers are far more abundant at the edge of fields than they are now in England. Corn mari-

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golds, a kind of large, yellow daisy, used to be one of the commonest English flowers. Now they are quite rare—but there they were in profusion round our villa. And the garden was full of young frogs—a creature that has vanished from many parts of Britain, though in this case due as much to the culling of frogs for cutting up in school biology labs, as to insecticides poisoning their food supply.

The Bretons retain no link with Britain, apart from incursions like ours; they still speak the Breton language (as well as French), but their one-time Celtic relatives across the Channel in Cornwall have forgotten it, and there's been no attempt to forge any reunion of the long-divided peoples. Yet you're reminded of Cornwall everywhere, with so many place-names, as in Cornwall, beginning with the prefix "Tre"—"home" or "settlement."

Going home feels even more like a tribal rite than arriving. These lettings are organised according to a standard pattern, and the *retour* for almost everyone is on the 15th or the 31st of the month. As you head east into Normandy, you begin to notice the GB plates again. As you turn up the Cherbourg peninsula, you start playing leapfrog with them. By the time you're five miles from Cherbourg, you're in an unbroken line of British cars. And so, one by one, you drive on to the ferry again—your bottles of duty-free Muscadet clinking, like everyone else's, in your car boot, as you bump up the ramp.

News from the literary front. William Golding's new novel, *The Paper Men*, his first book since he won the Nobel Prize for Literature, was not especially well received in Britain. Its portrait of a self-important but miserable old writer, who ends up with an awesome mystical vision of the "divine intolerance," seemed to have a lot in common with Golding himself; and insofar as it could be taken as a self-portrait, it was felt to contain both too many extravagant cries of *'Mea culpa'* and, in the same breath, too many symptoms of vanity. But the critics still remembered Golding's previous novel, *Rites of Passage*, such a different kind of book, with its impersonal weightiness and its elegant comedy.

A surprising novel that received much greater acclaim was a late 19th-century Spanish novel, *La Regenta*, which had never before been translated into English. Its author was a fierce literary critic, Leopoldo Alas, who wrote the book when he was 33: the Madrid literary establishment hated him for his reviews, the Catholic church hated him for his satire on priests, and his novel was effectively smothered. By the time he died, in 1901, *La Regenta* was almost forgotten.

However, in the splendid translation by an Oxford don, John Rutherford, it revealed itself as a novel that might have been writ-

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ten by Flaubert had he also been Anthony Trollope. "A vanished masterpiece from the great period comes back to us," said the critic, John Bayley, the professor of English literature at Oxford who is the husband of Iris Murdoch. The book is set in a northern Spanish cathedral town, Vetusta, based on the real town of Oviedo, and Bayley wrote:

> Alas is a connoisseur of the whole world of Oviedo, its cafés and priests, clericals and anti-clericals, the louche side and the respectable families. Above all, he is a connoisseur of the sexual drive, its shamelessness and pathos, its subtleties and disguises . . .

"Yoicks, poor Alas!" one might say, if Hamlet wasn't listening.

The good poets have been lying low. Philip Larkin won the W. H. Smith annual literary award for a collection of his articles and reviews, *Required Writing*; but he has only published two poems in the last five years. A new and rather odd literary prize loomed up on the horizon: the Betty Trask Prize of £12,500 for a "romantic" or "traditional" first novel by a writer under 35. Betty Trask was an author of romantic novels for women who left £400,000 to set up this award; and the English literary establishment has been rather embarrassed by it, especially as Miss Trask left the very respectable Society of Authors to administer it. Was it right, it was felt, to give such an enormous prize—bigger even than the Booker Prize of £10,000—to novels of a kind that all serious literary critics were likely to frown on? By interpreting the will in a fairly liberal way the Society has managed to make the requirement "traditional" and not merely "romantic," as it was feared at first would prove necessary. But the judges are not going to have an easy time being faithful both to the dictates of Miss Trask's will and their own literary judgment.

In general, the outlook for writers has been a shade better. About 6,000 of them have now received their first payments under Public Lending Right, the scheme by which the government rewards them for borrowings of their books in public libraries. Most of them got less than £500, but a few received almost £5,000; and nearly all got some cheering evidence that books they published years ago are still being lent out and (they hope) read. Publishers, too, recorded an upturn, though unsuccessful books were still being rapidly remaindered. I heard the story of an eager young journalist who went to see the august head of a publishing house. "And is it true, sir," he said, "that you keep on your shelves a copy of every book you publish?" "Oh yes," said the publisher. "And sometimes we keep thousands."

Yours till we meet again,
DERWENT MAY

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JOHN WAIN

Twofold

1

Celebrating
a symbiosis:
taking note of a successful
graft or splice or inlay or dovetail
of the one nervous system with the other,
bringing unison, bringing two-moving-as-one:

and marvelling at

two spines, one vertical, one horizontal,
two brains, one carried low for finding out,
one carried aloft six feet above the stones:

thinking of the delicate
communication, the wordless talking,
the sharing of perception and impulse, the trusting,
the identification, the mutuality so endless
so difficult to pin down with a neat description
we might as well give up and call it love:

thinking of these things,
marvelling,
celebrating these things,
I will sing, I will sing.

2

They shape a moving geometry
a not-quite-fearful symmetry

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his spine straight and tall
is the triangle's back wall

the taut leash the hypotenuse
her supple pads guiding his patient shoes

dictate the amalgam's progression
in calm Euclidean fashion

and as Euclid pondered
on forms that never wandered

beyond the reach of laws
hedged in like grazing cows

in necessity's green pastures
holding their logical postures

so thought with its true hold
plots the moves of Twofold

where impulses cluster
cool brain must be master

but the spirit's deep wells
nourish the brain-cells.

3

A duet of species finely performed, and also
an equally fine duet of genders, as I

imagine Twofold. Not, of course, inevitable:
some blind men must be led by male dogs, some blind

women by female dogs, some by male: still, most
guide-dogs are bitches, and in my mind's eye

for no better reason than being male myself
I see the upright partner as a man.

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I see the female perception guiding the male
investigating, reacting, preparing the ground

for the steps he makes towards a planned destination.
I see the female in light, the male in darkness.

She is familiar with contour and contingency,
with events' texture, with corners' abruptness:

he builds in darkness a world of intentions:
landscapes blossom within that globe of shadow.

He wants to construct the world according to his needs:
she needs to want the world in order to construct.

His is the strength, the onward-driving passion,
hers is the guiding and sustaining element:

as some great whale migrating across the world
follows the path of a stream within the ocean.

4

I was little. Dam, warm coat,
smell of good. Smooth, naked dugs.
Tug, drink. Other me's, push
for a dug. Then roll. Paws.
Straw. Was there straw?

Standups took me to a strange place.
No straw. Boards. In the big air,
hardness: rough pads. Pavement,
they kept saying, Pavement.

Where did they go, the other me's?
Did dam stay there?
Is her coat still warm,
somewhere?
Does good smell the same?

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I have a warm coat. But no
small me's. Standups gave me a sleep,
I woke up sick. After that,
dogs did not smell good:
dugs are somewhere else.
Pavement, pavement is my world.

5

I know smell-talk. A smell means *come*,
sniff. Turn here. Stop. Sniff.

Stand-ups told me No.
No smell.
Go forward. Dog-smell, man-smell,
sharp hunting cat-rabbit smell,
dustbin come-and-search smell,
earth-after-rain smell, saying *Dig*,
scratch: all No.

Go forward.
He has to go forward.
Standups do not know smell. It is not
their way of talking.
They use ears, eyes.
His ears. My eyes.
Go forward.

6

Safe: raised up
on a small cliff: steep quick sides
but short, easy. Yes, but big
in feeling. Down, trouble.
Danger. Fear. Could be the end
of light, warm. Could be crushed
broken bones, hurt. Up, good.

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Up on the small cliff, feet-scuff.
Standups walking, slow, quick.
Trousers. Skirts with sway.
Skirts with no sway. Boots.
All move, a river of Standups,
to where the small cliff stops. *Now:*
Watch. Listen. Eyes up
for lights. Or a green Standup
walking in a round eye.

Mostly, no lights. Just look
for Rollers being still. They
are waiting to kill us.
Make them wait.
When Standups walk, walk.
To the next cliff. Slow
as you go up: his foot
feels for safe. Safe comes.

7

Till I was seven, I had sight.
Light and dark built alternate worlds
One, two, day, night, time's footfalls.
I know what a house looks like,
a tree, a hedge; table, chair,
man, woman. I know clouds.
I know what a dog looks like.
I know what my dog looks like.

She sees me. I do not see her.
She sees house, table, chair, tree,
hedge. She knows the closed eye of night,
the open of day.
                But drably.
Her vision is monochrome, or nearly so.
I remember more sight than she sees.
I can recall the colour of butter,

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eggs, bread, oranges. I can say *Red*
and watch red grow in the blackness,
flow, bloom, spread, fire to warm the world.
Yellow is a dancing daffodil trumpet.
Green is lying down in coolness. Blue, ah,
blue is my secret festival. When I
was five, I dipped a white stick in a tin
of blue paint, on our garage floor.
I took it out. It dripped and trailed: Blue,
it said, Blue, Joy in blue. Joy in blue.

8

She is programmed for work.
He is programmed for leisure, friends, talk, music
and work.

Her work is to walk Twofold.
His is the Law. In a house
with others, he sits in quiet
rooms. Trees swish outside. He has
the quietest office, at the back.

All the others have eyes. He, sound-bound
has the most need of quiet. His ears
need to be focussed, fenced from disturbance.

Tree-swish and (muffled beyond doors) keyboard-tap.

Sometimes, her sigh. Stretched out
beneath the desk, her warm flank close
to his still feet.
Work, work.

9

We journey to the big talk-kennel.
Hello-voices. Coffee-smell. Then the long
waiting, under the wood he rests his hands on.

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Standups come in. He says, *Sit.*
He voices them. They voice him.
Often they use their sounds that are like ours,
their *that-hurts* whine, their *let-me-out* whine,
their alarm bark.

He voices on, always the same.
Easy, easy, quieting them.
They touch hands. They go.
More come.

10

They come to me to hear the law, to know
if the law will give them a little scope to live,
get someone off their back, even things out.

They have eyes, usually two per person, that drink
in the blessing of colour, the joy of light,
but colour and light are blurred by a crust of sorrow.

Their eyes serve as the gathering-point of tears
and when they look, it is with greed and fear
at what another has.
For my own part,

I do not seem to have much greed and fear.
My sorrow is channelled into one deep well.
I have not many grudges to avenge.

At my approach, people become more gentle.
They put away the clubs and the long knives
they use on one another: as if they thought

to be blinded is already club and knife,
enough to bear.
And so they sit and weep,
and stutter out the tale of loss and outrage

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that brings them to my door. And I sit here,
calm, taking notes with subtle finger-tips,

Who knows injustice better than I? Knows better
that just what happens is the force that rules?
Yet I explain the law, the law, the law.

11

August. A velvet night.
They tell me the moon is full.
I lie awake, throw back the covers, feel
on my skin the cleanness of the air.
That means the world outside
is flooded with the moon's calm light.

I feel the clarity:
I listen to the light. A bell-tower
chimes over there, beyond the orchard.

Waves of bell-sound come to me over sleeping
apple-boughs. I hear her twitch an ear:
it almost wakes her, almost communicates
some message: but what could it be?

Does she know what a bell is?
Does she know what apples are?
Not as I know them: yet they say
wild dogs, and even some that live in kennels,
howl when the moon is full.

12

Evening. It is feeding-time for both.
Others will set food before him, but first
he feeds her.

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The tin, in its expected place.
Round, smooth, heavy. One knowing hand,
the left, holds it table-steady: the right
drives in the harsh diminutive
sword-point of the tin-opener. Press, turn:
press, turn: a jagged circle falls
clean out. Repeat other end. Now push
a cylinder of meat and sliding fat
into her waiting dish.

Now crush in biscuits, scraps. A swill of milk.
He feels her waiting, hears her looking up.

So: place the dish. Then soap and towel.
Clean hands. Now it is his turn to be fed.

But as she licks and swallows, he is aware
she nourishes for him. Nerve-inpulses,
blood-density, soft marrow and hard bone,
satellite brain. Her pads are his fore-toes.
Her rough pelt sprouts from his scalp. Her eyes
are his two eyes, on snail-stalks.

The tin of meat he neatly circles out
feeds him. He murmurs grace.

13

They call the day over, lie down in attitudes
of relinquishment. Sleep folds in both spheres.

Singly, they lie, each exploring the individual
labyrinth of unconsciousness, wired to contrasting
diagrams. She patrols a thicket of residual
day-actions, brittle as firewood. His more lasting

sleep-catacombs, fanged with memory's stalactites,

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invite sober pacing, abound in rounded opaque
metaphor. Nothing connects their two nights
except the slumber that rounds them like a coiled snake,

unhitching their duality, refreshing them with a respite
of singleness. When light wakes them, all the more
willingly they build themselves back into Twofold:
connect, gear in, dance to their unheard music.

14

As grateful as the hand that warms the glove
their pliancy of trust. Has it a name?
We might as well give up and call it love.

This mutuality I'm thinking of
as double as two windows in one frame
is grateful as the hand that warms the glove.

Such woven trust of two, what does it prove?
Is it a dance, a combat or a game?
We might as well give up and call it love.

What eye can count the wing-beats of a dove?
Their rapid impulse-sharing is the same,
as grateful as the hand that warms the glove.

Gentle as leaves that whisper in a grove,
sudden as sparks that whirl above a flame:
we might as well give up and call it love.

Though strict neurology may disapprove,
I had to use the only words that came:
as grateful as the hand that warms the glove.
We might as well give up and call it love.

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STEVEN MILLHAUSER

In the Penny Arcade

In the summer of my twelfth birthday I stepped from August sunshine into the shadows of the penny arcade. My father and mother had agreed to wait outside, on a green bench beside the brilliant white ticket booth. Even as I entered the shade cast by the narrow overhang, I imagined my mother gazing anxiously after me from under her wide-brimmed summer hat, as if she might lose me forever in that intricate darkness, while my father, supporting the sun-polished bowl of his pipe with one hand, and frowning as if angrily in the intense light, for he refused to wear either a hat or sunglasses, had already begun studying the signs on the dart-and-balloon booth and the cotton-candy stand, in order to demonstrate to me that he was not overly anxious on my account. After all, I was a big boy now. I had not been to the amusement park for two years. I had dreamed of it all that tense, enigmatic summer, when the world seemed hushed and expectant, as if on the verge of revealing an overwhelming secret. Inside the penny arcade I saw at once that the darkness was not dark enough. I had remembered a plunge into the enticing darkness of movie theaters on hot bright summer afternoons, but here sunlight entered through the open doorway shaded by the narrow overhanging roof. Through a high window a shaft of sunlight fell, looking as if it had been painted with a wide brush onto the dusty air. Among the mysterious ringing of bells, the clanks, the metallic whirrings of the penny arcade I could hear the bright, prancing, secretly mournful music of the merry-go-round and the cries and clatter of the distant roller coaster.

The darkness seemed thicker toward the back of the penny arcade, as if it had retreated from the open doorway and gathered more densely there. Slowly I made my way deeper in. Tough teenagers with hair slicked back on both sides stood huddled over the pinball machines. In their dangerous

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hair, rich with violence, I could see the deep lines made by their combs, like knife cuts in wood. I passed a glass case containing a yellow toy derrick sitting on a heap of prizes: plastic rings, flashlight pens, little games with holes and silver balls, miniature animals, red-hots and licorice pipes. Before the derrick a father held up a little blond girl in red shorts and a blue T-shirt; working the handle, she tried to make the jaws of the derrick close over a prize, which kept slipping back into the pile. Nearby, a small boy sat gripping a big black wheel that controlled a car racing on a screen. A tall muscular teenager with a blond crewcut and sullen gray eyes stood bent over a pinball machine that showed luminous Hawaiian girls with red flowers in their gleaming black hair; each time his finger pushed the button, a muscle tensed visibly in his dark, bare upper arm. For a moment I was tempted by the derrick, but at once despised my childishness and continued on my way. It was not prizes I had come out of the sun for. It was something else I had come for, something mysterious and elusive that I could scarcely name. Tense with longing, with suppressed excitement, and with the effort of appearing tough, dangerous, and inconspicuous, I came at last to the old fortune teller in her glass booth.

Through the dusty glass I saw that she had aged. Her red turban was streaked with dust, one of her pale blue eyes had nearly faded away, and her long, pointing finger, suspended above a row of five dusty and slightly upcurled playing cards, was chipped at the knuckle. A crack showed in the side of her nose. Her one good eye had a vague and vacant look, as if she had misplaced something and could no longer remember what it was. She looked as if the long boredom of uninterrupted meditation had withered her spirit. A decayed spiderweb stretched between her sleeve and wrist.

I remembered how I had once been afraid of looking into her eyes, unwilling to be caught in that deep, mystical gaze. Feeling betrayed and uneasy, I abandoned her and went off in search of richer adventures.

The merry-go-round music had stopped, and far away I heard the cry: "Three tries for two bits! Everybody a winner!" I longed to escape from these sounds, into the lost beauty and darkness of the penny arcade. I passed several

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deadlooking games and rounded the corner of a big machine that printed your name on a disk of metal. I found him standing against the wall, beside a dusty pinball machine with a piece of tape over its coin-slot. No one seemed to be paying attention to him. He was wearing a black cowboy hat pulled low over his forehead, a black shirt, wrinkled black pants, and black, cracked boots with nickel-colored spurs. He had long black sideburns and a thin black mustache. His black belt was studded with white wooden bullets. In the center of his chest was a small red target. He stood with one arm held away from his side, the hand gripping a black pistol that pointed down. Facing him stood a post to which was attached a holster with a gun. From the butt of the gun came a coiled black rubber wire that ran into the post. A faded sign gave directions in tiny print. I slid the holster to hip level and, stepping up against it, practiced my draw. Then I placed a dime carefully in the shallow depression of the coin slot, pushed the metal tongue in and out, and grasped the gun. I heard a whirring sound. Suddenly someone began to speak; I looked quickly about, but the voice came from the cowboy's stomach. I had forgotten. Slowly, wearily, as if dragging their way reluctantly up from a deep well, the words struggled forth. "All . . . right . . . you . . . dirty . . . side . . . winder . . . Drrrrraw!" I drew my gun and shot him in the heart. The cowboy stood dully staring at me, as if he were wondering without interest why I had just killed him. Then slowly, slowly, he began to raise his gun. I could feel the strain of that slow raising in my own tensed arm. When the gun was pointing a little to the left of my stomach, he stopped. I heard a dim, soft bang. Wearily, as if from far away, he said: "Take . . . that . . . you . . . low . . . down . . .varmint." Slowly he began to lower his burdensome gun. When the barrel was pointing downward, I heard the whirring stop. I looked about; a little girl holding a candied apple in a fat fist stared up at me without expression. In rage and sorrow I strode away.

I passed the little men with boxing gloves standing stiffly in their glass case, but I knew better than to try to stir them into sluggish and inept life. A desolation had fallen over the creatures of the penny arcade. Even the real, live people strolling noisily about had become infected with the general wooden-

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ness; their laughter sounded forced, their gestures seemed exaggerated and unconvincing. I felt caught in an atmosphere of decay and disappointment. I felt that if I could not find whatever it was I was looking for, my entire life would be harmed. Making my way along narrow aisles flanked by high, clattering games, I turned left and right among them, scorning their unmysterious pleasures, until at last I came to a section of old machines, in a dusky recess near the back of the hall.

The machines stood close together, as if huddling in dark, disreputable comradeship, yet with a careless and indifferent air among them. Three older boys, one of whom had a pack of cigarettes tucked into the rolled-up sleeve of his T-shirt, stood peering into three viewers. I chose a machine as far from them as possible. A faded picture in dim colors showed a woman with faded yellow hair standing with her back to me and looking over her shoulder with a smile. She was wearing a tall white hat that had turned nearly gray, a faded white tuxedo jacket, faded black nylon stockings with a black line up the back, and faded red high-heels. In one hand she held a cane with which she reached behind her, lifting slightly the back of her jacket to reveal the tense top of one stocking and the bottom of a faded garter. With a feeling of oppression I placed my dime in the slot and leaned my face onto the metal viewer. Its edges pressed against the bones of my face as if it had seized me and pulled me close. I pushed the metal tongue in and out; for a moment nothing happened. Then a title appeared: A DAY AT THE CIRCUS. It vanished to reveal a dim woman in black-and-white who was standing on a horse in an outdoor ring surrounded by well-dressed men and women. She was wearing a tight costume with a little skirt and did not look like the woman in the picture. As the horse trotted slowly round and round the ring, sometimes leaping jerkily forward as the film jerkily unreeled, she stood on one leg and reached out the other leg behind her. Once she jumped in the air and landed looking the other way, and once she stood on her hands. The men and women strained to see past each other's shoulders; sometimes they looked at each other and nodded vigorously. I waited for something to happen, for some unspoken promise to be fulfilled, but all at

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once the movie ended. Desperately dissatisfied I tried to recall the troubling, half-naked woman I had seen two years earlier, but my memory was vague and uncertain; perhaps I had not even dared to peer into the forbidden viewer.

I left the machines and began walking restlessly through the loud hall, savoring its shame, its fall from mystery. It seemed to me that I must have walked into the wrong arcade; I wondered whether there was another one in a different part of the amusement park, the true penny arcade that had enchanted my childhood. It seemed as though a blight had overtaken the creatures of this hall: they were sickly, wasted versions of themselves. Perhaps they were impostors, who had treacherously overthrown the true creatures and taken their place. Anxiously I continued my sad wandering, searching for something I could no longer understand—a nuance, a mystery, a dark glimmer. Under a pinball machine I saw a cone of paper covered with sticky pink wisps. An older boy in jeans and a white T-shirt, wearing a dark-green canvas apron divided into pockets bulging with coins, looked sharply about for customers who needed change. I came to a shadowy region at the back of the hall; there was no one about. I noticed that the merry-go-round music had stopped again. The machines in this region had an old and melancholy look. I passed them without interest, turned a corner, and saw before me a dark alcove.

A thick rope of blue velvet, attached to two posts, stretched in a curve before the opening. In the darkness within I saw a jumble of dim shapes, some covered with cloths like furniture in a closed room in a decaying mansion in a movie. I felt something swell within me, as if my temples would burst; at the same time I was extraordinarily calm. I knew that these must be the true machines and creatures of the penny arcade, and that for some unaccountable reason they had been removed to make way for the sad impostors whose shameful performance I had witnessed. I looked quickly behind me; I could barely breathe. With a feeling that at any moment I might dissolve, I stepped over the rope and entered the forbidden dark.

It was too dark for me to see clearly, but some other sense was so heightened that I was almost painfully alert. I could

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feel the mystery of these banished machines, their promise of rich and intricate excitements. I could not understand why they had been set apart in this enchanted cavern, but I had no doubt that here was the lost penny arcade, crowded with all that I had longed for and almost forgotten. With fearful steps I came to a machine carelessly covered with a cloth; peering intensely at the exposed portion, I caught a glimpse of cracked glass. At that moment I heard a sound behind me, and in terror I whirled around.

No one was there. A hush had fallen over the penny arcade. I hurried to the rope and stepped into safety. At first I thought the hall had become strangely deserted, but I saw several people walking slowly and quietly about. It appeared that one of those accidental hushes had fallen over things, as sometimes happens in a crowd: the excitement dies down, for an instant the interwoven cries and voices become unravelled, quietness pours into the suddenly open spaces from which it had been excluded. In that hush, anything might happen. All my senses had burst wide open. I was so tense with inner excitement, which pressed against my temples, that it seemed as if I would expand to fill the entire hall.

Through an intervening maze of machines I could see the black hat brim and black elbow of the distant cowboy. In the tremulous stillness, which at any moment might dissolve, he seemed to await me.

Even as I approached I sensed that he had changed. He seemed more sure of himself, and he looked directly at me. His mouth wore an expression of faint mockery. I could feel his whole nature expanding and unfolding within him. From the shadow of his hat brim his eyes blazed darkly; for a moment I had the sensation of someone behind me. I turned, and saw in the glass booth across the hall the fortune teller staring at me with piercing blue eyes. Between her and the cowboy I could feel a dark complicity. Somewhere I heard a gentle creaking, and I became aware of small, subtle motions all about me. The creatures of the penny arcade were waking from their wooden torpor. At first I could not see an actual motion, but I realized that the position of the little boxers had changed slightly, that the fortune teller had raised a warning finger. Secret signals were passing back and forth. I

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heard another sound, and saw a little hockey player seated at the side of his painted wooden field. I turned back to the cowboy; he looked at me with ferocity and contempt. His black eyes blazed. I could see one of his hands quiver with alertness. A muscle in his cheek tensed. My temples were throbbing, I could scarcely breathe. I sensed that at any moment something forbidden was going to happen. I looked at his gun, which was now in his holster. I raised my eyes; he was ready. As if mesmerized I put a dime in the slot and pushed the tongue in and out. For a moment he stared at me in cool fury. All at once he drew and fired—with such grace and swiftness, such deeply soothing swiftness, that something relaxed far back in my mind. I drew and fired, wondering whether I was already dead. He stood still, gazing at me with sudden calm. Grasping his stomach with both hands, he staggered slowly back, looking at me with an expression of flawless and magnificent malice. Gracefully he slumped to one knee, and bowed his unforgiving head as if in prayer; and falling slowly onto his side, he rolled onto his back with his arms outspread.

At once he rose, slapped dust from his pants, and returned to his original position. Radiant with spite, noble with venomous rancor, he looked at me with fierce amusement; I felt he was mocking me in some inevitable way. I knew that I hadn't a moment to lose, that I must seize my chance before it was too late. Tearing my eyes from his, I left him there in the full splendor of his malevolence.

Through the quiet hall I rushed furiously along. I came to a dusky recess near the back; no one was there. Thrusting in my dime, I pressed my hot forehead onto the cool metal. It was just as I thought: the woman slipped gracefully from her horse and, curtseying to silent applause, made her way through the crowd. She entered a dim room containing a bed with a carved mahogany headboard, and a tall swivel mirror suspended on a frame. She smiled at herself in the mirror, as if acknowledging that at last she had entered into her real existence. With a sudden rapid movement she began removing her costume. Beneath her disguise she was wearing a long jacket and a pair of black nylon stockings. Turning her back to the mirror and smiling over her shoulder, she lifted her

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jacket with the hook of her cane to reveal the top of her taut, dazzling stocking and a glittering garter. Teasingly she lifted it a little higher, then suddenly threw away the cane and began to unbutton her jacket. She frowned down and fumbled with the thick, clumsy buttons as I watched with tense impatience; as the jacket came undone I saw something dim and shadowy beneath. At last she slipped out of the jacket, revealing a shimmering white slip which came to her knees. Quickly pulling the slip over her head, so that her face was concealed for a moment, she revealed a flowery blouse above a gleaming black girdle. Gripping the top of the girdle she began to peel it down, but it clung to her so tightly that she had to keep shifting her weight from leg to leg, her face grew dark, suddenly the girdle slipped off and revealed yet another tight and glimmering garment beneath, faster and faster she struggled out of her underwear, tossing each piece aside and revealing new and unsuspected depths of silken concealment, and always I had the sense that I was coming closer and closer to a dark mystery that cunningly eluded me. Prodigal and exuberant in her undressing, she offered a rich revelation of half-glimpses, an abundance of veiled and dusky disclosures. She blossomed with shimmer, silk, and shadow, ushering me into a lush and intricate realm of always more dangerous exposures which themselves proved to be new and dazzling concealments. Exhausted by these intensities, I watched her anxiously yet with growing languor, as if something vital in the pit of my stomach were being drawn forth and spun into the shimmer of her inexhaustible disrobings. She herself was lost in a feverish ecstasy, in the midst of which I detected a sadness, as if with each gesture she were grandly discarding parts of her life. I felt a melting languor, a feverish melancholy, until I knew that at any moment—"Hey!" I tore my face away. A boy in a yellow T-shirt was shouting at his friend. People strolled about, bells rang, children shouted in the penny arcade. Bright, prancing, sorrowful music from the merry-go-round turned round and round in the air. With throbbing temples I walked into the more open part of the arcade. The cowboy stood frozen in place, four boys in high-school jackets stood turning the rods from which the little hockey players hung down. Two small boys stood over the lit-

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tle boxers, who jerkily performed their motions. I turned around: in the dark alcove, before which stretched a blue velvet rope, I saw a collection of old, broken pinball machines. Across the hall the faded fortune teller sat dully in her dusty glass cage. A weariness had settled over the penny arcade. I felt tired and old, as if nothing could ever happen here. The strange hush, the waking of the creatures from their wooden slumber, seemed dim and uncertain, as if it had taken place long ago.

It was time to leave. Sadly I walked over to the wooden cowboy in his dusty black hat. I looked at him without forgiveness, taking careful note of the paint peeling from his hands. A boy of about my age stood before him, ready to draw. When the wooden figure began to speak, the boy burst into loud, mocking laughter. I felt the pain of that laughter burning in my chest, and I glanced reproachfully at the cowboy; from under the shadow of his hat his dull eyes seemed to acknowledge me. Slowly, jerkily, he began to raise his wooden arm. The lifting caused his head to shift slightly, and for an instant he cast at me a knowing gaze. An inner excitement seized me. Giving him a secret salute, I began walking rapidly about, as if stillness could not contain such illuminations.

All at once I had understood the secret of the penny arcade.

I understood with the force of an inner blow that the creatures of the penny arcade had lost their freedom under the constricting gaze of all those who no longer believed in them. Their majesty and mystery had been crushed down by the shrewd, oppressive eyes of countless visitors who looked at them without seeing their fertile inner nature. Gradually worn down into a parody of themselves, restricted to three or four preposterous wooden gestures, they yet contained within themselves the life that had once been theirs. Under the nourishing gaze of one who understood them, they might still spring into a semblance of their former selves. During the strange hush that had fallen over the arcade, the creatures had been freed from the paralyzing beams of commonplace attention that held them down as surely as the little ropes held down Gulliver in my illustrated book. I recognized that I

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myself had become part of the conspiracy of dullness, and that only in a moment of lavish awareness, which had left me confused and exhausted, had I seen truly. They had not betrayed me: I had betrayed them. I saw that I was in danger of becoming ordinary, and I understood that from now on I would have to be vigilant.

For this was the only penny arcade, the true penny arcade. There was no other.

Turning decisively, I walked toward the entrance and stepped into the dazzle of a perfect August afternoon. My mother and father shimmered on their bench, as if they were dissolving into light. In the glittering sandy dust beside their bench I saw the blazing white top of an ice-cream cup. My father was looking at his watch, my mother's face was turning toward me with a sorrowful expression that had already begun to change to deepest joy. A smell of saltwater from the beach beyond the park mingled with a smell of asphalt and cotton candy. Over the roof of the dart-and-balloon booth, silver airplanes were sailing lazily round and round at the ends of black cables in the brilliant blue sky. Shaking my head as if to clear it of shadows, I prepared myself to greet the simple pleasures of the sun.

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WENDY LESSER

Even-Handed Oddness: George Gissing's *The Odd Women*

It's odd that it should be a book published ninety years ago which has finally caused me to break my silence about the "women's movement." But perhaps that isn't so strange after all. A major problem with discussions in and about the women's movement has been that they are overwhelmingly subject to the pressures of immediacy. They always seem likely to take off toward one extreme or another, as if *this* were the eternal situation. Or, they are burdened with all the recent clichés of thought and language, so that however much one tries, the discussion can't break out of the current view. In this sense, the women's movement has definitely suffered from a dearth of historical perspective. (At its worst, this takes the form of rejecting all works of art that were created before the present period of enlightenment.) This narrowness of vision has been further exacerbated by a clannishness of gender—the assumption being that men have relatively little to say that's of use to modern women. If this behavior leads to the foolish elevation of Elizabeth Gaskell over Charles Dickens and Kate Millett over D. H. Lawrence, it also has a contrary ill effect: that is, it conveys an implicit message that women have little to say that's of use to men. Thus, while women's studies departments are busy setting up their new hierarchies of literary values, ensconcing Virago authors like Margaret Kennedy and Antonia White in the places formerly held by E. M. Forster and Evelyn Waugh, male teachers and readers cling ever more protectively to their old favorites, rejecting all of Virago's rediscoveries and allowing only the most time-tested females (Jane Austen usually passes) to intrude on the male domain. And so the gap widens.

Enter George Gissing. For much the same reasons that *Tootsie* is one of the best recent movies about men and wo-

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men—because and not in spite of the fact that its central female is actually male—Gissing's *The Odd Women*, first published in 1893, is one of the best portrayals of the women's movement, old or new. Unlike Mesdames Sand and Eliot, this George *is* a man—and while that fact doesn't come through in any particular aspect of the novel, it colors the whole tone of the endeavor. The nature of Gissing's authorial enterprise might almost be the subject of a crucial exchange in the novel itself, in which a woman character responds playfully but seriously to a man who has just praised her judgment over another woman's:

> "That compliment," she said, "pleases me less than the one you have uttered without intending it."
> "You must explain."
> "You said that by making Miss Barfoot see she was wrong you could alter her mind toward me. The world's opinion would hardly support you in that, even in the case of men."

The gentleman's unintended compliment to women has been his assumption that reason guides their behavior. In George Gissing's case, the compliment—to both men and women—that he has "uttered without intending it" is his faith in empathy: in *The Odd Women*, he has doubted neither his own ability to portray male and female minds, nor his readers' abilities to enter equally into both. Were the novel written by a woman, it might well sound too much like exhortation; a more assertively masculine novelist, on the other hand, might have made this topic the occasion for satire. It is precisely to the degree that Gissing falls into neither camp that the novel succeeds both as fiction and as social comment. Like the Dustin Hoffman character in *Tootsie*, Gissing hovers carefully between the roles of a man dressed in woman's clothing and a woman enclosed in a man's body.

The novel's title refers, as one character puts it, to unmarried women—the "odd" ones left over after everyone else has paired up. This purely arithmetic definition gets picked up elsewhere in the novel in the profession of Mr. Micklethwaite, a mathematician who has written a book on "Trilinear Co-ordinates" and whose wife "never got much past the Rule of

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Three," though he hopes that they will be able to "gossip about sines and co-sines before we die." Such language suggests the humor of viewing odd and even as anything other than mere mathematical concepts; yet in Gissing's time as in our own, the word "odd" had a further meaning—that is, abnormal, strange, or eccentric. Those who got left out of the Victorian pairing process and remained unmatched were subjected to worse indignities than mere mathematical taunts: they were essentially the failures of the social system.

The Odd Women is about a number of such "failures": Mary Barfoot, a handsome forty-year-old woman who runs a clerical training school for young women; Rhoda Nunn, her strong-minded thirty-year-old assistant; the Madden sisters—Alice, Virginia, and Monica—who turn out to be a couple of pathetic spinsters and an unhappy young wife; and assorted other single women ranging from Miss Eade (a shopgirl-turned-prostitute) to Miss Royston (who poisons herself after being abandoned by her married lover) to Miss Wheatley (who marries Micklethwaite after a seventeen-year engagement) to Miss Haven (who plans to start the first women's newspaper). All except the first five are basically walk-on parts, and even the two elder Miss Maddens, Alice and Virginia, are mainly foils for their stronger companions. But Mary Barfoot, Rhoda Nunn, and Monica Madden—along with the men who enter and touch their lives—are fully developed characters who illustrate the central difficulties and pleasures inherent in living alone.

Monica Madden is perhaps the least "modern" of the three, in that she somewhat resembles the standard nineteenth-century fictional female. Like Becky Sharp or Jane Eyre, she aspires to a marriage above her station; like Rosamund Lydgate or Gwendolyn Harleth, she hastily marries one man and then falls in love with another; like David Copperfield's mother or the first Mrs. Dombey, she dies in childbirth. Yet Monica—the only married woman in this group of odd women, and therefore "odd" in a contrary way—is far more strong-minded than a Dickens female. She knows herself well enough to dread the secretarial career for which Misses Barfoot and Nunn want to prepare her, and she also sees her unmarried elder sisters—a decreasingly genteel lush and a fat but sickly

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governess—as frightening counterexamples. She fears poverty, but she won't marry for money alone: first she must convince herself that she loves her prospective husband, and when she realizes her self-delusion she feels morally obliged to leave him. She is not a feminist by principle, but in practice she rebels against the restrictions of the feminine fate.

Monica's marriage, because it is the only marriage seen from the inside, gives Gissing his only opportunity in this novel to explore the boundaries of marital jealousy and possessiveness. Monica's husband, Mr. Widdowson, begins by being overly devoted and ends by being jealously tyrannical; but even Widdowson, though he is perhaps the most exaggerated of the central characters, has a human softness as well. Just before he and his wife have their final break, Gissing gives him a moment of transcendent self-perception: " 'We are unsuited to each other,' " he thinks to himself:

> " . . . My ideal of the wife perfectly suited to me is far liker that girl at the public-house bar than Monica. Monica's independence of thought is a perpetual irritation to me. I don't know what her thoughts really are, what her intellectual life signifies. And yet I hold her to me with the sternest grasp. If she endeavored to release herself I should feel capable of killing her. Is this not a strange, brutal thing?"
>
> Widdowson had never before reached this height of speculation.

What makes Gissing's vision of sexuality so sophisticated—so much closer to Lawrence's, say, than to Dickens'—is that it encompasses the desire for power and possession. In Monica's case, this desire destroys the marriage because it overwhelms the puny sexual attachment between the two partners; but in the case of Rhoda Nunn, this will to power represents the cause as well as the fatal flaw of her only major love affair. Rhoda's lover is Everard Barfoot, Mary's ne'er-do-well cousin (and the man, incidentally, for whom Mary has harbored an unrequited passion for most of her life). Rhoda, as her last name suggests, is not the sort of woman who has had much to do with men. She thinks she has chosen the single life freely and with conviction; she scorns marriage as she scorns weak women; but a secret corner of herself mistrusts her motives and wonders whether her staunch position is simply the

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result of never having been asked. Soon after she meets Everard, she makes up her mind to force him to propose; he has already decided to win her over to a "free union" without legal marriage. Each initially considers this a mere game of wills. Yet even after they have actually fallen in love, the need to win still dominates both of them. The proposal scene (in which he wants her to agree to a free union before he will propose, and she wants a proposal before she will agree to a free union) might have come directly out of *Women in Love*—and in the end, like Gudrun and Gerald, they lose each other through the hardness of their wills. There is a lesson implied here, of course: Gissing seems to want men as well as women to be "womanly" (tender) without being "womanish" (weak). But there is also a counterlesson, in the tremendous appeal of Rhoda's and Everard's willful passion. Such fierceness is the root of their love as well as its poison, and the tension between them is what makes the affair Lawrentian in stature and strength. Gissing, clearly aware of this essential element, at one point compares Everard's ideal of marriage to the happy marriage of his friend Micklethwaite:

> Micklethwaite walked with him to the railway station; at a few paces' distance from his house he stood and pointed back to it.
>
> "That little place, Barfoot, is one of the sacred spots of the earth. Strange to think that the house has been waiting for me there through all the years of my hopelessness. I feel that a mysterious light ought to shine about it. It oughtn't to look just like a common house."

And just as we are about to smile smugly at the absolutely Dickensian sweetness of it all, Gissing pre-empts us:

> On his way home Everard thought over what he had seen and heard, smiling good-naturedly. Well, that was one ideal of marriage. Not *his* ideal; but very beautiful amid the vulgarities and vileness of ordinary experience. It was the old fashion in its purest presentment: the consecrated form of domestic happiness, removed beyond reach of satire, only to be touched, if touched at all, with the very gentlest irony.
>
> A life by no means for him. If he tried it, even with a woman so perfect, he would perish of *ennui*. For him marriage must not mean repose, inevitably leading to drowsiness, but the mutual incitement of vigorous minds.

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To leap in one paragraph from a tender appreciation of the Dickensian hearth to an argument for Lawrentian conflict is no mean feat—even if the prose *does* creak a bit in the process.

Lest it begin to seem that this book about single women is really about marriage, I should point out that the third central figure, Mary Barfoot, is utterly removed from the prospect of romance. Yet she remains a sympathetic figure—in many ways the most sympathetic ideologically, if the least accessible in fictional terms. I would have liked to know more about her pain and her indecision; we are told they exist, but we never see them up close the way we do Rhoda's. Perhaps this is because Mary is already "womanly" enough: she advocates the importance of tenderness and mercy, and perhaps the addition of her own sentimental episodes would have overbalanced the portrait in the direction of mush. Rhoda, on the other hand, needs to be seen from the inside if she is not to seem utterly hardhearted. In a way, the three central women form a kind of bizarre trinity in which Rhoda, through Monica's suffering, is brought to a state of redemption that resembles Mary's initial state of grace. Having previously rejected Mary's belief that women ought to preserve a nurturing, maternal quality, Rhoda finds herself at the end of the book holding Monica's orphan daughter:

> She gazed intently at those diminutive features, which were quite placid and relaxing in soft drowsiness. The dark, bright eye was Monica's. And as the baby sank into sleep, Rhoda's vision grew dim; a sigh made her lip quiver, and once more she murmured, "Poor little child!"

The child who provokes Rhoda's maternal pity is not just the orphan, or not just Monica embodied in her daughter, but also the child Rhoda might have had if she had chosen to marry Everard—as well as Rhoda's own child-self, that naively tough woman who finally disappears only when Rhoda herself begins to understand the power of passion.

If I have made *The Odd Women* sound like a treatise in favor of womanly virtues, I have done it an injustice. The novel makes a tremendous effort (in which it is largely successful) to show a number of different alternatives for women's lives

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without (1) urging one over the others or (2) presenting a sociological smorgasbord. The achievement is not an easy one: most recent "women's issue" novels have erred in either the former direction (think of Marilyn French) or the latter (Sara Davidson). It is very hard to balance good fiction with self-conscious feminism, as even the most courageous failures illustrate. (Among these last I would number Alice Walker's *The Color Purple,* which starts beautifully and then declines in strength as it arrives at its ideological "solutions.")

Both the virtues and the shortcomings of Gissing's "feminist" novel can best be observed by comparing it to an obvious counterpart: Henry James's *The Bostonians.* James's novel appeared seven years before Gissing's, in 1886, and there is some indication that Gissing was familiar with it (at least, he borrowed its heroine's surname, Tarrant, for a central character in his 1894 novel *In the Year of the Jubilee*—but I suppose that *could* be coincidence). Still, nobody would ever accuse Gissing of cribbing either his plot or his "message" from James. Where *The Odd Women* is an eminently fair, consciously antiromantic, intellectually respectful appraisal of the women's movement, *The Bostonians* is a melodramatic, intensely emotional, potentially offensive portrait of an easily manipulated feminist "preacher" torn between her lesbian colleague and a powerful male suitor. Only the most hard-line feminists would take issue with Gissing, but few would be able to stomach James. Yet *The Bostonians* is the better novel—in large part because, like the subjects it discusses (sex, power, politics), it is a bit crazy. Fairness, in other words, is the weakness of *The Odd Women* as well as its strength.

Compare the passages I've quoted from *The Odd Women,* for instance, to the paragraph that ends *The Bostonians.* This final scene follows on nearly a hundred pages of high-pitched suspense, in which we don't know whether Verena Tarrant will leave her family, profession, and friend Olive to marry Basil Ransom, or not. (Nor can we be sure, I think, which we *want* her to do.) The novel ends with Verena's abrupt disappearance from her final speaking engagement:

> "Olive, Olive!" Verena suddenly shrieked; and her piercing cry might have reached the front. But Ransom had already, by muscular force, wrenched her away, and was hurrying her out, leaving Mrs. Tarrant to heave herself into the arms of Mrs. Burrage,

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> who, he was sure, would, within the minute, loom upon her attractively through her tears, and supply her with a reminiscence, destined to be valuable, of aristocratic support and clever composure. In the outer labyrinth hasty groups, a little scared, were leaving the hall, giving up the game. Ransom, as he went, thrust the hood of Verena's long cloak over her head, to conceal her face and her identity. It quite prevented recognition, and as they mingled in the issuing crowd he perceived the quick, complete, tremendous silence which, in the hall, had greeted Olive Chancellor's rush to the front. Every sound instantly dropped, the hush was respectful, the great public waited, and whatever she should say to them (and he thought she might indeed be rather embarrassed), it was not apparent that they were likely to hurl the benches at her. Ransom, palpitating with his victory, felt now a little sorry for her, and was relieved to know that, even when exasperated, a Boston audience is not ungenerous. "Ah, now I am glad!" said Verena, when they reached the street. But though she was glad, he presently discovered that, beneath her hood, she was in tears. It is to be feared that with the union, so far from brilliant, into which she was about to enter, these were not the last she was destined to shed.

Unlike *The Odd Women,* this novel ends with the requisite marriage, with the salvation of the maiden by the powerful knight who rips her from the jaws of the monster. Yet he rips her a bit harshly ("Ransom had already, by muscular force, wrenched her away"), in a manner that seems frighteningly sexual ("Ransom, as he went, thrust the hood of Verena's long cloak over her head," "Ransom, palpitating with his victory"), and he seems rather too eager to efface her maidenly independence even before she has fully left it behind (" . . . to conceal her face and her identity," "It quite prevented recognition . . ."). And then there are those tears. If they are not because the marriage is "so far from brilliant" (and James's ironic "It is to be feared . . ." suggests that they are not), then perhaps there is a stronger and less ironic reason for them. James has given us the marriage of which Gissing, in a spirit of antiromantic truth-telling, has deprived us—yet it is James who finally leaves us with more doubts about the institution of marriage. We committed novel-readers may well find ourselves secretly wishing that Rhoda had given in and married Everard, but few of us will be sanguine about Verena's choice. However much we want her to be "saved" from Olive and Mrs. Tarrant (and the cards are certainly stacked in that direction), we can't help feeling apprehensive about *this* form

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of salvation. The tears that close this novel-with-a-happy-marriage are far more tragic than those that dim Rhoda's vision as she looks at the sleeping baby. If the ending of *The Odd Women* confirms its message (that women can live alone, that independence need not be equivalent to hardness, etc.), the ending of *The Bostonians* turns the whole notion of "message" on its head: James's is a far more radical act of fiction.

On the other hand, Gissing has his own special collection of literary virtues, not least among which is his ability to convey the economic and social texture of daily life. What did it mean, specifically, to be a working woman (or man) in the London of 1893? *The Odd Women* provides all sorts of fascinating minutiae in answer to this question. Before reading this novel, I did not know that a single woman could get a room in a "respectable" boarding-house for five shillings sixpence a week—or slightly more if "attendance" (cleaning, meal service, etc.) were included; that unaccompanied shop-girls walked fearlessly through London at all hours of the day or night, though "ladies" were afraid to do so; that secretarial work was considered a male province (and therefore respected), while teaching and nursing were female (and therefore disdained); that a woman could be more compromised by going to a man's "flat" than to his house (where servants were likely to be present); that a London fog could be so heavy, and street-lighting so poor, as to render the distance from Sloane Square underground station to Queen's Road, Chelsea impassable by foot; that gin was readily available in grocery stores and affordable even to the poorest women, while brandy was the drink of more genteel alcoholics; and many more such informational tidbits. This is the kind of thing Gissing does so well in his other novels (I'm thinking of *New Grub Street* and *In the Year of the Jubilee,* both currently in print): his grasp of social truth lies in a feel for detail, an awareness of which facts will ultimately prove to have both historical and narrative importance.

Yet *The Odd Women* manifests one very strange difference from those other novels. *New Grub Street* and *In the Year of the Jubilee* both focus heavily on the issue of class. Poverty is evil not just in itself, but in contrast to the rest of society, which leads its life as if the poor didn't exist. The destitution of the starving writer in *New Grub Street* is set against both the idealistic world of literature and the comfortable existences of his

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better-off friends. In Gissing, the material world cannot be ignored and the power of money is never underrated.

To a certain extent these feelings make their way into *The Odd Women* as well. Thus the marriage between Micklethwaite and Miss Wheatley, delayed for years because of his financial inability to support a wife, is described in the following terms: "The simplest of transformations; no bridal gown, no veil, no wreath; only the gold ring for symbol of union. And it might have happened nigh a score of years ago; nigh a score of years lost from the span of human life—all for want of a little money." Similarly, Monica Madden's unhappy marriage is clearly motivated by her desire to escape poverty—again, a tribute to economic forces. And the central feminist theme of the book—the training of women for clerical jobs through which they can support themselves—would also seem to hinge on the power of money. But at some very basic level, economic issues are *not* the point of this novel. Miss Barfoot makes this clear to her assembled trainees when she says to them, "I am not chiefly anxious that you should *earn money,* but that women in general shall become *rational and responsible human beings*" (her emphasis).

In fact, *The Odd Women* has far less sympathy for the poor than one finds in the more typical Gissing novels. The only memorable portrait of a working-class woman occurs in the occasional appearances of Miss Eade, whose decline from shopgirl to prostitute is pictured as the inevitable result of her own stupidity, and whose intermittent screeches of envy and suspicion haunt Monica Madden during her simultaneous social ascent. The implicit principle—that class is a more damning limitation than gender—is made explicit in a conversation between Mary Barfoot and one Mrs. Smallbrook:

> "But surely you don't limit your humanity, Miss Barfoot, by the artificial divisions of society."
>
> "I think those divisions are anything but artificial," replied the hostess good-humoredly. "In the uneducated classes I have no interest whatever. You have heard me say so."

Miss Barfoot goes on to expound on her lack of interest in "the lower classes (I must call them lower, for they are, in every sense)," to which Mrs. Smallbrook responds:

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"But, surely . . . we work for the abolition of all unjust privilege? To us, is not a woman a woman? . . . I aim at the solidarity of women. You, at all events, agree with me, Winifred?"

"I really don't think, aunt, that there can be any solidarity of ladies with servant girls," responded Miss Haven, encouraged by a look from Rhoda.

"Then I grieve that your charity falls so far below the Christian standard."

That last line, the disdainfully diminutive ring to Mrs. Smallbrook's name, and the general sympathy accorded to Miss Barfoot's position are enough to clue us in on the narrator's position here: clearly this busybody do-gooder is meant to be about as appealing as Dickens' Mrs. Jellyby, who enthusiastically organizes missionary trips to Africa while her own household falls apart around her. The message—whether it be Gissing's or that of the contemporary women's movement, as embodied in Mary Barfoot—appears to be that one should set one's own house, or class, in order first. As Miss Barfoot says: "I choose my sphere . . . I must keep to my own class." The novel itself presents certain possibilities for overcoming the barriers between intelligent men and women (in the potential marriage of Everard to Rhoda, and in his actual marriage to Agnes Brissenden), but it presents none for overcoming class barriers.

In part, this pessimism might be traced to Gissing's own experiences. The veteran of two unsuccessful marriages—one to a prostitute, the other to a shopgirl—the middle-class Gissing may indeed have begun to feel that class barriers were insuperable. He certainly had more reason than most of his contemporaries to feel that men could directly benefit from the intellectual and economic independence of women—a goal which may have struck him, by this time, as more reasonable and practical than the entire restructuring of the social order. And he may also have been taking his cue directly from the women's movement of his day: given the accuracy of his other social observations, it is quite likely that the Mary Barfoots of his acquaintance were more convincing than the Mrs. Smallbrooks.

But the discrepancy remains disturbing. Educated, in part, by Gissing's own social awareness, we cannot quite swallow the inconsistency between the championing of female free-

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dom and the trampling of society's weaker members. Mary Barfoot herself embodies this inconsistency, while Rhoda Nunn hardheartedly but logically evades it. In a conversation between the two of them about women who can't be helped to independence, Mary says:

> "I don't like your 'ragged regiment' phrase. When I grow old and melancholy, I think I shall devote myself to poor hopeless and purposeless women—try to warm their hearts a little before they go hence."
>
> "Admirable!" murmured Rhoda, smiling. "But in the meantime they cumber us; we have to fight."

If we are torn between the logic of Rhoda's view and the appeal of Mary's, then Gissing has succeeded in revealing to us the crucial dilemma of the women's movement. Modern feminists have, for the most part, been drawn from the politics of the left: equal rights for women, like nuclear disarmament, socialized medicine, and full employment, is seen as a liberal cause. Yet there is nothing inherently left-wing (though there may be something quite radical) in the assertion that women should be economically and intellectually equivalent to men. This reform, if it could be effected in the blinking of an eye, would simply increase the available pool of those who might ultimately climb to power on the backs of others. In itself, it would do nothing to alter the *numbers* at the top or the bottom; it would merely alter their sexes.

I do not know what to do with these realizations generated by *The Odd Women,* just as I have never known what to do with my feelings about the women's movement as a whole. The novel has condensed for me two conflicting and intertwined concerns: on the one hand, the sense that my being a woman is a crucial fact of my existence, justifying some feeling of kinship with women as a group; and, on the other hand, the overriding belief that if we are ever to get anywhere in fixing up the world, we cannot identify only with those who are linked to us through such feelings of kinship. Gender is an insurmountable barrier that one can nonetheless try to surmount—as the author of *The Odd Women* has so generously and ably done.

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MARVIN MUDRICK

The Last Great Composer

From 1948 to 1971 Robert Craft shared unreservedly and put on daily record the life of the world's last great composer ("This is the first time since Guillaume de Machaut that the world is without a great composer," said one of the letters of condolence from grieving strangers at the news of Stravinsky's death). Craft's *Stravinsky: Chronicle of a Friendship* (Knopf, 1972) is in quite the strictest sense a chronicle—it consists of excerpts from Craft's diary: e.g. Stravinsky dies April 6, 1971—"the time of death is five-twenty [AM]. . . . At 6 PM, in a daze, we go to the funeral home, where . . . a prayer service is held for . . . [Mrs. Stravinsky] and a few friends (among them Lincoln Kirstein, weeping like a child, and Balanchine, very calm, who embraces and thanks me for 'everything you did for him')." Balanchine was thanking Craft for having been the associate, companion, friend, and—all but legally—adopted son of Stravinsky's green old age; also, no doubt, he was saluting him as the only begetter of the works of Stravinsky's seventies and eighties, the third and latest essential collaborator of Stravinsky's very long artistic career, in the line of succession after the supreme impresario Diaghilev and the supreme artist who for half a century had been Stravinsky's central and uniquely matching collaborator, Balanchine himself.

"I have been guilty of mistakes and misjudgments in trying to take care of I.S.," Craft notes on May 24, 1969. "But I have given all of myself to him and to the job, at least, and[,] if I hadn't[,] a great deal more might have gone wrong and his musical life would have come to an end"—i.e. once Stravinsky had completed his final neo-classic piece, *The Rake's Progress,* there would have been nothing. "One afternoon in March 1952 [Stravinsky was in his seventieth year], during a drive to Palmdale in the Mojave Desert, he sat silently, then choked up, suddenly said he was afraid he could no longer

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compose. And for a moment or two he wept. I tried to encourage him by proposing that he orchestrate his *Concertino* using, in addition to the obligato violin and cello, wind instruments employed in the *Octet* and *Mass . . .*": Craft as quoted by Joan Peyser (in "Stravinsky-Craft, Inc.," *The American Scholar,* Autumn 1983) from one of "several typewritten[?] letters Craft sent to me in August 1982." *Agon* and the pieces that followed it would have remained uncomposed, and Stravinsky might well have sunk into a terminal conviction that he had outlived his powers, if Craft hadn't induced him to listen to serial music and thus enabled him to discover that its methods were practicable for him, if Craft when nothing else offered hadn't encouraged him to orchestrate Bach or Gesualdo or himself, if Craft hadn't by dint of affection, concern, and sympathetic bullying "made him do it"—the dedication of *Monumentum pro Gesualdo* reads, "To Bob, who forced me to do it and I did it."

Now nobody so far has suggested, publicly anyhow, that, whatever sort of forcing went on, *Agon* and after weren't Stravinsky's own doing. For some, though, the question is whether, as regards the comments attributed to Stravinsky in Craft's diary and in the books of conversation,[1] Craft wasn't just forcing but was often actually doing. An all-out on-the-spot-and-in-the-know exposé was attempted in the memoir by Lillian Libman (a booking agent who arranged concerts for Stravinsky and during the last years occasionally lived in the Stravinsky home), *And Music at the Close: Stravinsky's Last Years* (Norton, 1972), which, according to Craft, "is marred by three shortcomings: she relies too heavily on fantasy and hearsay; she gives no indication of having understood anything about Stravinsky; and the majority of her statements are either factually wrong (totally or in part), or misleading in viewpoint and interpretation"; and Craft proceeds, in Appendix E of *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents* (with Vera Stravinsky; Simon and Schuster, 1978), to accomplish as amply documented a job of discrediting the book as such a sendoff

[1] CONVERSATIONS WITH IGOR STRAVINSKY. $4.95. MEMORIES AND COMMENTARIES. $5.95. EXPOSITIONS AND DEVELOPMENTS. $5.95. DIALOGUES. $6.95. THEMES AND CONCLUSIONS. $8.95. By *Igor Stravinsky* and *Robert Craft.* University of California Press.

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requires. Notwithstanding, on the particular issue of who said what in the conversations, the evidence isn't so clear as one would like in the section in which Craft begins by quoting Libman's explicit charge and then attempts to dispose of it once and for all:

> Miss Libman writes that
>
> > [Stravinsky] always sounded better and more literary in languages over whose idiom he had a more complete command than over English. Robert, therefore, created a style that he felt conveyed the quality of Stravinsky's exact expressions. [P. 240]
>
> In truth, "Robert" recognized, as have most others quoting Stravinsky, that no such style could be created. But although his own English in later years was always superior to that of his collaborations with this writer or with anyone else, Stravinsky's writings and conversations could not be published without the assistance, inevitably injurious as it was, of another hand. At the time of Miss Libman's "association" [with Stravinsky], Russian was the only other language over which Stravinsky had a more complete command than English, but since she neither spoke nor understood his other languages, one wonders how she is able to pronounce judgment on his use of them. Stravinsky's German was reportedly more correct than his French (which was never idiomatic), and few of his German interviewers fail to comment on his expert command of that language. . . . But Stravinsky lived in the English-speaking world longer than he did in the French, and, late in life, he read and wrote in English more regularly and more easily than he did in French. Of the more than seventy Simenon *romans* that he read in his last years, for example, by preference all but five were in English translations. Stravinsky's English, in his later years[,] was inventive, amazingly resourceful in vocabulary, too cosmopolitan in grammar. It is for the last reason that his writings and conversations could not be published without the assistance, however regrettable, of another hand. But what makes Miss Libman think that to sound "more literary" is to "sound better"?

But Craft himself can be very literary: for example his numerous reviews over the years in *The New York Review of Books* have sometimes seemed unduly preoccupied with other writers' improprieties of grammar and syntax, solecisms the correction of which would result in passages "more literary" but not necessarily more expressive; and I regret that he hasn't

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given us, if not Stravinsky quite bare, maybe a few dozen specimens of unedited Stravinsky talk to allow us to make our own judgments of the original. There is the precedent of Caruso's letters to his wife (published in her memoir of him), which in an idiom not much above Ellis Island manage to be distinctively expressive (" I went to the theater in a very bed conditions. There I tried my voice and I was surprised of the lightness. Then I was a little quite with my nervs but the headache were there in bak of my head. . . . There comes the third act were is the romance. Ah, dearie, I dont know where I found such a voice! . . ."); or the characteristic corner-cutting turns of phrase as Balanchine recollects (in an interview published posthumously in *The New Yorker,* September 12, 1983) how he came to do *The Four Temperaments* ("I had some money—about five hundred dollars—and I didn't know what to do with it. I thought maybe to buy a cigarette case or to do something. But then I said maybe Hindemith would like to write something for that money. So I called his editor and I said that for the five hundred dollars would he like maybe to write me something for piano and just a small ensemble. And yes, sure, he said that he had time and he'd like to do it. I said anything he wants, and he says, 'I don't know.' So he wrote 'Four Temperaments' . . ."); and Stravinsky in a state of nature must have been light-years less minimalist and more literary than either, if nevertheless not literary enough for Craft. "Thank you very much, go to hell," said Stravinsky sounding unliterary enough to be only himself while expressing his attitude toward critics and other such busybodies, as Paul Horgan quotes him in *Encounters with Stravinsky* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972); I wish that half a hundred times or so he had said the same to his full-time live-in editor who was busily touching up his "too cosmopolitan . . . grammar" and rather complacently noting that "a merger . . . *has* taken place between the senior and the junior, the creative and imitative components of our firm."

All the same, it's unthinkable not to stand firm with the firm when, eleven years after Libman, along comes Joan Peyser to level her psychohistorical artillery against "Stravinsky-Craft, Inc." (does she know she's echoing, two decades later, the snidest of the pioneer debunkers, Paul Henry Lang: "Mr. Stravinsky should use the business designation 'A Division of

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Craft Products Inc.' "?): "My own view"—*she says, and I will interrupt with emendations whenever needed*—"is that, however eccentric"—*though she gives no evidence, of which besides in the published material there isn't any*—"and even repugnant many of the details of this Stravinsky-Craft relationship were . . ." —*though she gives no evidence; and what horrible secrets is she keeping from us?*—"From 1920"—*but Stravinsky didn't meet Vera de Bosset (who found him "the wittiest, most amusing man I had ever met") till 1921*—"to 1939 Stravinsky had lived in a triangle with his first wife, Catherine, and Vera."—*but to the casual reader Peyser might seem to be saying it was a* ménage à trois, *and it wasn't: there were two households in different countries, and Stravinsky was mostly with Vera*—"Catherine's death left Stravinsky and Vera alone, and it is just possible that this simple twosome seemed empty and inadequate to them both. . . ."—*or, on the other hand, it's just possible, in the absence of any evidence whatever to substantiate her mean-spirited speculation and with scads of evidence to refute it, that this simple twosome seemed vivid and bounteous to them both; for one thing, "Vera" was one of the great beauties of the epoch (courted, painted, poetized about) with a quicksilver wit and intelligence all her own, and wonderful stories of her own: "V. recalls [for Craft] that when she first saw . . . [the poet Mayakovsky], in Petrograd in 1917, the point was that he should not see her. 'I was in a cabaret in the Champs-de-Mars one night when Mayakovsky came in, but Sudeikine [her husband] quickly put a napkin over my head and pushed me under the table. Mayakovsky was supposedly irresistible to women' "; but, having interviewed Mrs. Stravinsky in the nick of time to gather a few tidbits, Peyser was at any rate tactful or prudent enough to hold off till Mrs. Stravinsky's death before plunging into print*—"How can Craft tell us that, in the late 1930s, Stravinsky wrote only fifteen hundred words of the thirty-thousand-word *Poetics of Music* without ever acknowledging his collaborators publicly, and then expect his readers to believe that Stravinsky's post-1954 prose was written entirely by the composer himself?"—*but Craft never says so; and, as for the pre-1954 prose, in* Expositions and Developments *(footnote, p. 134) Stravinsky himself makes a relevant "acknowledgment": "My autobiography and* Poetics of Music, *both written through other people, incidentally—Walter Nouvel and Roland-Manuel, respectively—are much less* like *me, in all my faults, than my 'conversations'; or so I think.*"—"This is particularly hard to accept in light of

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the style of these writings."—*but, as Horgan pointed out while correcting somebody else, they're "recorded dialogues (not 'writings') with Mr. Craft*"—"Those who had firsthand knowledge of Stravinsky"—*but she says she herself never met him*—"knew the composer to be fiercely intelligent, capable of identifying a problem right away, witty and pungent in his expression, and always free of pretention. They also knew he was no intellectual in the sense in which he has been presented to us in these late writings. Although the ideas that relate to music and aesthetics are most probably Stravinsky's own, the articles and books published under his name in the late 1950s and 1960s use the jargon of modern psychology, physics, mathematics, and musicology in a way that is as alien to Stravinsky's own character and temperament"—*of which she herself had no firsthand knowledge, and very likely little secondhand knowledge beyond what she might have gleaned from the published conversations of the "Stravinsky" she has repudiated; furthermore, "I have never," says Libman, "run across so voracious a reader [as Stravinsky], unless it be Robert," and nobody has challenged Craft's assertion that at least during the last two decades of his life Stravinsky "reads continually, with the range of a polymath and the speed of a reviewer," that indeed he was a rapid, constant, and omnivorous devourer of multitudes of books including shelves of dictionaries (in 1970, living temporarily in a hotel apartment, "We still have about fifty dictionaries even here," Mrs. Stravinsky remarked to Horgan) and the ten thousand volumes in his home, representative titles of which indicate that many of them "use the jargon" which, however, Peyser declares "alien" to him because so she has heard from her sources, "those [unnamed intimates] who had firsthand knowledge of Stravinsky" but who are less up-to-date than she would wish because during the last two decades of his life, except for Mrs. Stravinsky, nobody else had anything like the firsthand knowledge of him that Craft had*—"as it is congenial to the interests and personal style of Craft himself."

Hence it seems that there aren't going to be any indisputable proofs for Lang-Libman-Peyser, Inc., unless Craft decides on his deathbed to spill the beans; but how then could we be sure he wasn't a Dostoevskian figure setting the truth out of reach forever for the glory of eternal odium? Meanwhile I propose a somewhat heretical thesis of my own: that it

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wasn't Craft who wrote "Stravinsky," it was Stravinsky who wrote "Craft" as anyone can plainly see who reads the pieces Craft has been publishing in *The New York Review of Books* since Stravinsky's death, which, astute and animated as they are, don't take any risks, have for instance nothing of the dictionary hi-jinks ("edentate beldams"; "haloes of circumvolant flies"; "this sabulous Agapemone")—reminiscent of Stravinsky's—or the lush descriptiveness of "Craft's" writing in the books about Stravinsky. The weightiest objection to this thesis, though, is that from the very beginning "Stravinsky" is so much keener, wittier, more word-perfect, more authoritatively outrageous and unreliable than Craft or even "Craft" that I can't imagine why he wouldn't rather have produced more of himself than taken the trouble to draw back into a diminished alter ego.

At their first meeting, in a hotel suite in Washington, D.C. on March 31, 1948, Stravinsky instantly seems the least likely in the world to play straight man or second fiddle:

> He is physically so extraordinary . . . that nothing less than a lifesize statue (not merely a head or bust), or scaled-to-lifesize drawing (the seated portrait by Picasso is misleading), could convey his uniqueness: the pygmy height [Craft is getting carried away; Stravinsky was five-two, not three-six], short legs, fleshlessness, football player's shoulders, large hands and wide knuckles, tiny head and recessive frontal lobes, sandy hair (black in photographs), smooth red neck, and high hairline. He is so absorbing to look at, in fact, that an effort is required to concentrate on what he says. And when that predicament has been overcome, a greater one arises in knowing how to respond. Many of his remarks are so sweeping, absolute, exclusive, as well as so exaggerated and *parti-pris*, that the listener is uncertain whether his leg is being pulled. Add to this the difficulty that agreement is obviously expected for no matter what he says. . . .
>
> Still, respond one must. I do so easily to a joke about "Hollywood composers who farm out their orchestrations and whose scores should be marked 'Coloring added,' like the labels on food cans." But I have no idea how to react to a verbal thumbsdown on the Beethoven Violin Concerto because "That D sharp in the first movement is such an ugly note"; or to a Nietzschean argument denying the Germanness in German music, "Because, you see, Bach was a Saxon, Beethoven was Flemish, Haydn was a Croat, Mozart was Austrian, Mendelssohn was a Jew." . . .

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The Stravinsky whom Craft met was already one of the great men of the century, and he didn't hesitate to make use of his advantage. One of his notorious ripostes had been delivered a few years earlier when, at dinner with a friend on the day after Bartók's death, his "only reaction was, 'I never liked his music anyway.' " True (as happened to be the case), he hadn't ever bothered to listen to it: "Actually," says Craft, "Stravinsky did not know Bartók's music"; but genius has its privileges, death is overrated, sentiment is deadly, ask me no questions I'll tell you no lies, and at any rate it's all a matter of taste. " 'Taste is for pederasts,' I.S. says, 'and for most other people it is simply a matter of familiarity. Other people's toes are ugly, but not our own because we grew up with them and got to know them well in the piggly-wiggly stage.' " (As early as 1915, though, he was obliged to make an exception: "I sometimes think that taste does not matter, but then I listen to Scriabin.") In Hamburg in 1963 they attend a performance of Verdi's *Don Carlo*, and Craft complains about almost everything:

> the staging lacks action, and some of the little there is goes wrong, such as the sword-drawing in the street scene, which also marks the breakdown of credibility in the work as a whole and is a weak curtain-closer. Nor do the sets offer much compensation, their main feature being a row of overgrown asparagus meant to represent trees. The drama falls off so sharply after the Grand Inquisitor scene, in any case, that the rest is hardly more than a costume concert. . . . But despite the shortcomings, I.S. is rapturous. "What scope and vitality Verdi had, and with what scale he could endow his people! How I would like to have known him! His was the true spirit of *libertà*, too, and he, not Wagner, was the true progressive, not merely the Verdi of the Risorgimento and Cavour's parliament, but the composer of the *Don Carlo* duet [between Don Carlo and Rodrigo] . . . which, to me anyway, is so much more likable than that other *Blutbrüderschaft* music which fat people in horns and hides howl at by the hour."

—because what matters infinitely more than taste is appetite (at the age of eighty yet!), which the most imperfect realization of an opera as grand as *Don Carlo* suffices to rouse and satisfy. Come to think of it, taste is nearly as bad as good taste, which Stravinsky can easily dispense with. In 1962, after an evening of festivities at the White House in his honor

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(President: "How do you feel now, Mr. Stravinsky?" Stravinsky: "Quite drunk, thank you, Mr. President"), "The Kennedys accompany us to the door [Craft reports] and wait with us fifteen minutes until the chauffeur, not anticipating our early retreat, is found. And here, alone with us, they are gracious, warm, and totally disarming. I.S., in the car: 'Nice kids.' " Or "he remarks that 'Berg is a thematic composer, and how he loves to caress his themes, to turn them this way and that. But the vibraphone goes on urinating in the ear a little too long.' " Or he "misremembers" the title of Poulenc's opera *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* (*The Breasts of Tiresias*) as *Les Mamelles de ma tante*—because elementary French texts are prone to carry on about "the pen of my aunt" but Stravinsky has more expansive domesticities in mind, as he usually does: thinking about the superbly salient dancer Vera Zorina (who in addition has a strong pair of eyebrows) he exclaims with somewhat misplaced reverence, "What a superorbital ridge!"; in Rio de Janeiro in 1960, "I.S., back from a stroll, says he was propositioned by one of the *poules* patrolling the hotel area. 'And I was tempted, too; you could dial a telephone with her nipples.' " Or he notices the sluggishness of Wagnerian lovers: "Naturally such people have to swallow philters before they can *do* anything." Or, applauded as he takes his seat in the Hamburg opera house (four evenings after *Don Carlo*) for a performance of *Der Rosenkavalier*, he "whispers to . . . [Craft] that 'It is because everybody is very happy to see me sit through four hours without syncopation.' But he *doesn't* sit; or at any rate, he doesn't sit still. 'How long can this false counterpoint go on?' he mutters in a *voce* not *sotto* enough and 'How can anybody swallow all of that *Schlagsahne* [whipped cream]?' " (In a documentary film, he responds to "a student's question as to 'what specifically' he dislikes in the music of Strauss with 'I do not like the major works, and I do not like the minor works,' adding, off camera: 'Strauss's music is over-homogenized.' ") Or, paying back Auden (librettist of *The Rake's Progress*) for having made him endure "twenty minutes of squirming" at *Die Walküre* on the phonograph, he impolitely "puts it down as 'improvisation' "—another bitter pill (neither philter nor *Schlagsahne*) to swallow for devotees of Wagnerian and Post-Wagnerian *longueurs*. Or "the 'predatory

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female' idea [in Menotti's opera *The Last Savage*] might have possibilities . . . —I am thinking of Mr. Robbins's ballet [*The Cage*] about her to the music of my String Concerto—especially to talented bachelor composers such as Britten, Henze, Tchaikovsky, and Menotti. . . . (I imagine a spooky atmosphere piece with an unexplained dread, as in *The Turn of the Screw*.)" Or the ballet *Orpheus*, despite "Balanchine's rather corny choreography for the Furies" (which, as Stravinsky forgets to point out, heavily influenced the much cornier choreography by Robbins for the predatory females in *The Cage*), "was an immediate success, largely because it was brilliantly danced, especially by some of Balanchine's present and future wives." (But of course he knew that Balanchine was his only living peer and complement—Balanchine said that every measure of Stravinsky's music could be danced—and he adored Balanchine's ballets, not only the ones to Stravinsky music: "What a real marvel, this first act of *The Nutcracker*!!!" Also, according to Craft, he was "especially fond" of Suzanne Farrell and "considered her the most musically intelligent dancer he had ever observed.") Or, shocking out of their orthopedic shoes all the other charter members of the Society of Elders of the Tribe, he has a go at the scraggy throats, so to speak, of a brace of magi who can't understand why he doesn't emulate them by settling for a toothless diet of philters and *Schlagsahne*:

> And, oh yes, there was a television program, the wisdom of Pablo Casals, I believe. *That* was an interesting performance. In one scene the cellist and a sort of Hungarian composer, Zoltán Kodály, are shown together with their great-granddaughters—or so the viewer supposes until learning a blush later that they are the wives. And what are the two racy octogenarians talking about? Well, they are talking about the trouble with me, which is that I must always be doing the latest thing—*they* say, who have been doing exactly the same old thing for the last hundred and eighty years. Señor Casals offers extracts of his philosophy, too. It is a matter of some simplicities; of his being in favor of peace and against Franco, for example, and of playing Bach in the style of Brahms. . . .

What these elders and many of their juniors won't tolerate in him is that at seventy or eighty or almost ninety he refuses

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their invitation to lie down (tucked in, as a reward for his prestige, like Goethe or King David next to a tame virgin to warm the sheets: the rite of spring) and die real good like a wise man should, punctuating his last rites with paragraphs of soft-core wisdom from the battle of life. But instead what a life of standing up and pissing against walls! On a holiday in Naples with Picasso "we were both arrested one night for urinating against a wall of the *Galleria*. I asked the policeman to take us across the street to the San Carlo Opera to find someone to vouch for us. The policeman granted our request. Then, as the three of us marched backstage he heard us being addressed as *maestri* and let us go." Which isn't to say Stravinsky doesn't have his own climactic (not to say climacteric) dreams of glory:

> At times during the composition [of the *Requiem Canticles*] I have been comforted by the knowledge that my great-grandfather lived to 111. And I have wondered what he was like at 84. He did not compose music, I know, but—so family tradition goes—he was doing something very like it, which is making love. In fact, the old gentleman, bless his hormones, died in consequence of a fall while he was trying to scale a garden fence on his way to a rendezvous. What a way to go! as the Americans say. Better yet, what a time of life to go that way.

That frisky ancient was the exception to Stravinsky's dark and bitter image of family. He had a very unhappy childhood, which in the books of conversation he recalls at length and variously. "I do not like to remember my childhood, and the four walls of my and [my brother] Goury's room represent my most abiding impression of home. Our home was like Petrushka's cell, and most of my time was spent there." "A new life began for me after the death of my father, when I began to live more in accordance with my own wishes. I even left home on one occasion, leaving my mother the traditional note to the effect that life at 66 Krukow Canal was impossible . . . but after a few days my mother managed to fall ill enough to force me back. She did behave slightly less egotistically after that, however, and her delight in torturing me seemed slightly less intense." "The real answer to your questions about my childhood is that it was a period of waiting for

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the moment when I could send everyone and everything connected with it to hell." "I do not remember the maids, for the reason that they were often changed; as I grew older, my mother made certain they grew older, too." "My life at home was unbearable at that time (even more unbearable than usual, that is)." "Like childhood—my childhood—old age is a time of humiliations." One day, while visiting Wagner's villa in Triebschen at the age of eighty-six, Stravinsky was suddenly "transported" to an afternoon "on my first Swiss holiday four fifths of a century ago":

> I had returned from a walk with my father that day, and as we entered the lobby of our hotel, the Schweizerhof, he told me to look in the direction of a beautiful lady he said was the Empress Elizabeth of Austria. And he added, I think because it was only shortly after Mayerling, that she was "*neschastna*" (unhappy). . . .
>
> Have I in fact remembered this because of my father's word, which I borrowed for my own miseries? *My* "unhappiness," so I have always been accustomed to think, was the result of my father's remoteness and my mother's denial of affection. When my eldest brother died suddenly, and my mother did not transfer any of her feelings for him to me, and my father did not become less aloof, I resolved (that resolution made at some time and for one reason or other by all children) that someday I would "show" them. But now that someday has come and gone, and no one remains to whom it would mean anything to be "shown" whatever is left to show, I myself being the last witness.

Still, he showed them. In 1908—at the age of twenty-six; anything but a prodigy—he was a fledgling composer in St. Petersburg, one of the more promising students of Rimsky-Korsakov (Craft: "his pre-*Firebird* creations are surprisingly plodding, evincing little more than an acquisition of competence in other composers' idioms"). By 1911 he had composed for Diaghilev *The Firebird*, *Petrushka*, and *The Rite of Spring*, next to Tchaikovsky's big three the three greatest pieces of ballet music ever, the great symphonic ballets of the century, three successive bursts of invention that made him the major composer for Diaghilev's company, the artistic associate of Fokine, Benois, Bakst, and Nijinsky, the colleague and friend of Debussy and Ravel, the newest and brightest

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star in the world of music. When he composed *The Rite of Spring* he was twenty-nine, with his whole career and the century before him, having composed as unprecedented and revolutionary a piece of music for the twentieth century as the *Eroica* had been for the nineteenth—only, unlike the *Eroica*, the *Rite* turned out for both its composer and his century to be an end rather than a beginning; and in 1965, when for a television documentary Stravinsky revisits the cell-like room in the Swiss pension ("His face floods with pleasure, entering this amazingly tiny and constricting room") where he composed it, Craft observes that "ghosts, souvenirs, and even the opening of tombs may be less hard than the realization that the fifty-four intervening years have produced no composition to equal the one he composed here, this at any rate being the weight of opinion behind the promiscuous lens that has been prying down on him all morning, focusing on *Le Sacre* of all his life work."

Stravinsky at eighty-five: "Do these seventy years constitute a period of high musical achievement? *I* think they do, and I would rate the highest flights of the time with the greatest achievements of the past. It is true that no great river of music comparable to the rivers of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven has flowed from any . . . composer of the period . . . but then neither the age nor the nature of the new music is conducive to fluency." Yet I doubt that even Stravinsky believed what he gallantly affirms in the second half of his second sentence; and the end of his answer seems a transparent begging of the question; and I wonder how at thirty, fresh from having accomplished the highest flights of his time, he would have responded to a prediction that in his time history would not permit another "great river of music" from a great composer. "I must explain," he concludes the same section, "that I have never thought in perspectivist terms concerning my own participation in the century's music. My activity—reactivity, my animadverters would call it—was conditioned not by concepts of history but by music itself. I have been formed in part, and in greater and lesser ways, by all of the music I have known and loved, and I composed as I was formed to compose": which seems to contradict the historical determinism that

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shadows the answer he has just given, and which also seems intended to disarm any historical-determinist argument against his compositions after *The Rite of Spring*.

It was a strange career. Till the Russian Revolution he was a Russian artist having his early and spectacular triumphs in France, as one of those instances of unimpeded cultural exchange that had been going on between the two countries since the eighteenth century. After the Revolution he was a permanent exile in France (and ultimately the United States), cut off from his country and its music, cut off (by Russia's nonconformity with international copyright agreements) from the millions in royalties he would have collected for his three perennial concert staples, compelled by his premature eminence and the force of his personality and intellect to play the role of master to French disciples (one of whom wrote about him in 1914: "this astonishing intelligence that ranges beyond music and this, perhaps unique, union of the most startling ingenuity and the most refined wisdom") who themselves had grown up in another tradition altogether and might, by the force of cultural climate and sheer numbers, in the event have had more influence on him than he on them. Anyhow, his own thunderous *Eroica* was not a stage in a river of music that unendingly issued in later and still greater masterpieces; and which of us could imagine, without the historical record, that the composer of the *Capriccio* or the Violin Concerto or *Movements,* or even of *Apollo* and *Oedipus Rex* and *Symphony of Psalms,* had a generation earlier "begun" with such cataracts of music as *The Firebird, Petrushka,* and *The Rite of Spring*?

Through many of the conversations he talks about "the new music" and proudly about his own part in it: the designing of tone rows, new kinds of symmetry and momentum to replace those of tonal music; "masterpieces" by Carter, Boulez, Stockhausen. But near the end of his life the new recedes and he is attentive mainly to Bach, Mozart, Beethoven (the great rivers of music):

> Does the world of the Beethoven [last] quartets exist outside of music, then, and is it possible to discover a reflective system between the language structure of the music and the structure of

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> the phenomenal world? No, to the first, but to the second, well, yes, perhaps, eventually. All the same, the music of the quartets, and of *The Magic Flute*, accedes to an in-extremis importance in the human consciousness beyond the pleasure principle, or divertimento principle, on which it nevertheless continues to depend . . .

—and beyond which it moves at our peril: "it seems to me that the intentional meaning of the opera, the triumph of Life over Death, is reversed at times in the depths of the music; in the brave little parade of Music through the gates of Death, for example, the flute charms the Keeper into a stay of execution, but the piece is a funeral march, nonetheless. Death is just beneath the surface in much of the other music as well, especially Pamina's; and in the great C-minor fugato-chorale, which somehow succeeds in sounding Beethoven's *'Eroica'* note without Beethoven's display of superior will, the wings of the terrible angel are closer than they have ever been before in music." ("Music," as he remarked during Craft's first meeting with him, "is the best means we have of digesting time.") Nor is it that he's for the moment reclaiming certain legacies of the past without surrendering any of his faith in the present. A few pages earlier he has taken to expressing his dissatisfaction with some aspects of the new music: "I am losing patience with music that does not sing or dance (the day has long gone by since we have had very much of that) and that makes no other gesture I can understand except to reflect mechanical processes that quickly set me adrift. Nor am I satisfied by the promise of 'consequentiality' in these processes; I am only interested in, at my age I can only afford to be interested in, content."

"I remember," Mrs. Stravinsky told Peyser in 1980, "when the first letter from Bob arrived. Stravinsky came into the room and said, 'I received a letter. It is from a young man. It is marvelously written. And so true. He is young but he knows everything.'" Soon he came to live with them and shared Stravinsky's musical life (he was—and, with fewer opportunities, very likely still is—an excellent conductor); and kept a diary, though he denies he's a Boswell: "which I say because no reference to me neglects to call me that. . . . The

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difference is that Dr. Johnson needed a Boswell and I.S. doesn't"—which in turn makes no sense to me regarding either connection, because love as well as need ruled both connections, and several of the other parallels are very close, perhaps the most important for posterity being that without Boswell and Craft we would have lost some of the best offhand utterance in the world from world figures who didn't "need" anybody else only to the extent that both were already great and commanding for other reasons. Craft would doubtless contend that his chief use was to keep Stravinsky composing; but those who dote on the late conversation and can live without the late works will grant only that the chief use of the late works may well have been to sustain the morale of the great composer who was thereupon ready and willing to say something useful about everything, religion for instance ("Sacrifice is the basis of religion, but sleeping on beds of nails and living on diets of grass are only experiments, not sacrifices"), careers ("a friend . . . asks him to 'suppose that when you were a young man a beautiful goddess had offered you any career *other* than that of composer, what would you have chosen then?' 'Well, if she were *really* beautiful,' he says, 'I would probably have chosen *her*' "), or music—during a "souped-up" performance of *The Marriage of Figaro*: "Mozart is poorer than that"; or the twentieth-century master of orchestration on Wagner and Mozart as orchestrators: "Wagner had a marvelous understanding of wind and brass instruments, but his vanity required something sublime, and for this reason he put the wind instruments, the brass, and the strings together. But he deprives the strings of their natural sonority. The greatest of all musicians, Mozart, was also the greatest master of instrumental harmony, and he never fell into error"; or "Handel's reputation is another puzzle to me, and I have thought about him much recently, after listening to *Belshazzar*. . . . [His] inventions are exterior; he can draw from inexhaustible reservoirs of allegros and largos, but he cannot pursue a musical idea through an intensifying degree of development"; "Tchaikovsky's talent was the greatest of any Russian musician and, with the exception of Mussorgsky's, the truest. His virtues, as I thought, were his elegance . . . and his sense of humor . . . but even this Tchaikov-

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sky was derided as a sentimental absurdity and, of course, he is so derided still"; "I was guided by no system whatever in *Le Sacre du printemps.* When I think of the other composers of that time who interest me—Berg, who is synthetic (in the best sense), Webern, who is analytic, and Schoenberg, who is both—how much more *theoretical* their music seems than *Le Sacre*; and these composers were supported by a great tradition, whereas very little immediate tradition lies behind *Le Sacre du printemps.* I had only my ear to help me. I heard and I wrote what I heard. I am the vessel through which *Le Sacre* passed" (but his own late works were guided by the very system of those with whose "theoretical" music he is here contrasting the free and untrammeled *Rite*). Or, in 1968, "Listening to *Pelléas* after dinner, I.S. says he likes it much more now than the last time he heard it. When was that? I ask. 'With Debussy' "; or

> *Le Coq d'or* had become a rallying point for students and liberals because of its having been banned several times by the tsarist censor; the performance, when it actually did materialize, was not in the Mariinsky, but in a private theater in the Nevsky Prospect. Rimsky did not show any concern with the politics of the affair (yet he certainly was concerned). I think he was too hopelessly in love with the soprano Zabela, who sang the Queen of Shymakhan, to care about anything else. Zabela was the wife of the painter Vrubel. She sometimes sang songs by Rimsky at social gatherings, and when this happened the composer would almost swoon with pleasure.

—and he's got a million of 'em: not just here and now but sixty or seventy years back, not a spectator or super but already one of the top or featured names in the cast, familiarly among the august shades, he was there; he saw; he heard.

He could even be polite. His *Scènes de Ballet* was commissioned for *The Seven Lively Arts* by the Broadway showman, Billy Rose, who after the first night of the preview run sent him a telegram: "YOUR MUSIC GREAT SUCCESS STOP COULD BE SENSATIONAL SUCCESS IF YOU WOULD AUTHORIZE ROBERT RUSSELL BENNETT RETOUCH ORCHESTRATION STOP BENNETT ORCHESTRATES EVEN THE WORKS OF COLE PORTER. I telegraphed back: SATISFIED WITH GREAT SUCCESS." During a reception in the U.S. Embassy in Wellington, New Zealand: "Large N.Z.

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lady to I.S.: 'Frankly Mr. Stravinsky, I like the *Firebird* best of all your works.' I.S.: 'And what a charming hat you have.' Small N.Z. gent to I.S.: 'People here are very fond of modern music. We had half a program of your own works once' (I.S., later: 'My *Scheherazade*, no doubt'). . . . Wife of high N.Z. dignitary to I.S.: 'Do you like architecture, Mr. Stravinsky?' I.S.: 'Let me think about it.' "

He was a long time dying, holding out for years with all his vital energies against grim death, in and out of hospitals for tests, treatments, surgery. He had three weeks left when he was taken to the hospital for his last stay:

> "What should I do? What should I do?" he asks V. again and again in the ambulance, but V., choking back her tears, can only say, trying to calm him, "You do nothing. Other people will do."
>
> And do they ever! He is processed like a product on an assembly line, the chest clamped with cathodes, the trachea scoured by a vacuum cleaner, the nostrils invaded with plastic oxygen tubes, the right inner elbow embrocated to expose a vein that a Draculess then punctures to draw a remarkably copious "specimen." The left arm, meanwhile, is strangled by a sphygmomanometric pump, implanted with a tube for intravenous feeding (a rivulet of diuretics to flush the fluid from the lung), and bandaged to an ironing-board splint. Last and worst, he is catheterized, the deed done by the head of the Urology Department who, apologizing for the discomfort, says afterward, "Maestro, I hope we are still friends." But the maestro angrily demolishes any assumption that they ever were.

"At one point, in reply to V.'s 'Why do you call me every minute and rap on the bed railing with your rings when you *know* I am here?' I.S. says something marvelously, inimitably I.S.-ian: 'But I want to be sure that *I* still exist.' "

He thought about everything; just as his friend "Artur Rubinstein *likes* to play the piano," so Stravinsky *liked* to think: "I prefer thinking to understanding, for thinking is active and continuous, like composing, while to understand is to bring to an end." He had thought about old age, which full of pain and humiliation reminded him of his childhood; but he had also thought hard about the alternative, and he preferred to keep right on thinking.

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JOHN QUINN

The Camas Meadow War

for J. R.

I

A devout and proper Methodist, he saved
the easiest for last. Easy because
it was already meadow. Last as much

from circumstance, perhaps, as method;
it was farthest from the county road
of all his homestead land. He'd always

thought of it for winter fodder those
first years, while he cleared the rest
by hand and powder charge, levelling

with a stone boat and his heavy team
of gelded Belgian greys. That land all
had gone for pasture, all the while

saving this fine meadowland for last.
And all the while his stock increased.
Lambs and calves and pigs each spring.

Children of his own, now two. And now
a week or so behind the plow-horse,
he'd have ten new acres of alfalfa hay.

The best of all the land he owned. If
the Lord had chosen it for grass, how
could he do better, himself, than that?

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II

He was two days into plowing when
they came, six of them, in feathers
and felt hats, leading a busted

chestnut hack and Brownlee's borrowed
jackass none of them could ride. Led
by Bottle John, Elizabeth's old man,

told by his woman this was the way
real Indians made war. Weaponless,
the other five stood shyly by while

Bottle John tried to speak. He mumbled
at the ground, shuffled his bare feet
in the damp loam of the plow's dark

virgin furrow. The farmer listened,
leaning on the plow. His plow-horse
stamped a platter in the meadow grass,

shook its heavy harness, impatient
for the pull of work. "Yes, John,
I know you," the farmer said, "but I

can't hear you. Speak up now, man!
Speak up!" The others edged about,
eager to escape the farmer's line

of sight. This was not part of what
they knew, to fight. Like their fathers,
their finest art was run and hide.

But Bottle John was set to suffer
for his woman's wicked tongue.
Slowly, Bottle John stood straight,

raised his eyes to the white man's eyes.
"You never plowed this place before."
This made even Brownlee's jackass nervous.

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"John, do you mean to say you think
this meadowland of mine is yours?"
There it was: Ownership. Blasphemous

as the plow to Bottle John, but this
from a Christian man whose people had put
the slave-raiding Klakamass down—

whose people had power to tame horses
for work, and to plow the ground black,
power to shroud the land with their farms,

power to fall the tall trees for lumber,
but most of all, power to make whiskey
that burned holes in a man's blood.

Bottle John had seen all this himself,
yet here he was, telling this farmer
not to plow. Surely this Christian man,

though he was kind—his wife fed Indians
in winter at their kitchen door—surely
this farmer now would strike him down.

Even Brownlee's jackass thought so.
"No, sir, not that," said Bottle John.
"But even Indians has got to eat."

III

"They call it *kamiss*," the woman said,
wrinkling her nose, powdered white
from making bread. "It's horrid stuff!

I had some once—the mush-cakes they
make of it. Elizabeth wanted to trade
them for eggs." They sat relaxed,

supper done, with the weekly paper,
waiting for the nightly baking.

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"I suppose you gave her the eggs."

"Of course," the woman, smiling, blushed.
"You women keep a lot of secrets."
"I suppose we must. But you know,

it wasn't his idea, coming out like that.
She says she set him to it. Shamed him
down at Brownlee's. He'll beat her, sure,

she says. But first he had to do it."
The farmer was surprised his wife
should take such violence in stride.

"Yes, he surely did! And the fellow
has his nerve as well," the farmer said.
"After I told him I wouldn't plow,

but would fence that meadow for horses
if he and his braves would pitch in,
he asked me for whiskey! Claimed that

was the way they did things down
at Brownlee's." Now the woman was
laughing. "But heavens, they can't

last long that way. And the way they
gamble!" But this was mirth enough.
The farmer loudly cleared his throat

and rattled his paper at the word.
"Yes, well, but they *were* here first,
I guess, weren't they," the wife said.

"They were, at that. But it says here
they've got the measles at West Linn
now," the farmer changed the topic.

"It won't take long for them to come
down the river with all these new

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people coming in. Mark my words,

Brownsville will have them by June."
The woman was stunned. "Husband!
Pray the Lord will spare us that!"

IV

But of course the measles came in June,
up the north-running Willamette, down
the valley, and the farmer lost his only

son. And Elizabeth lost Bottle John.
They made a special camp for Indians
at Bryant's Landing, and many Kalapuya

came for fear of dying alone. But more
died there than if they'd stayed away.
More died than if they'd run and hid.

And by autumn the surviving veterans
of the Camas Meadow War numbered only two.
Brownlee's jackass died that summer too.

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ERIC A. HAVELOCK

The Double Vision of Greek Tragedy

I. THE DRAMA OF CHARACTER

THE *HIPPOLYTUS* OF EURIPIDES appeared in its first production at Athens in the late spring of 428 B.C. The play has a complex composition. It contains ten speaking parts—an average number for Euripides—including two choruses, one male and one female. The episodes, divided by entrances and exits and distributed between songs and spoken speech, arrange themselves within a system of symmetries which is almost geometric. The speaking parts are apportioned unevenly between two disparate types of speakers, one divine, the other human. The latter, occupying nine tenths of the play, in contrast to the former, appeals directly to the sensibilities of a modern audience. It conforms to that spirit of humanism which has dominated the stage ever since Shakespeare. We can tolerate Shakespearian witches, magicians, sprites and ghosts, but nothing more supernatural. The assumptions of monotheism have made polytheistic representations implausible, since the one god or supreme being is by definition invisible and therefore not a stage personality.

The interesting thing about the *Hippolytus* is that the action conducted at the human level can be isolated and considered within its own boundaries as an autonomous dramatic performance, possessing its own dramatic integrity as to motivation, decision and consequence. Let us present to ourselves this major portion of the play, before considering what in fact follows when the same drama is seen as it is imprisoned within the divine apparatus. The spectators climbing up into their seats in the sunlit amphitheater below the brow of the Acropolis wait for the entrance of the actor who is to play the lead. They see him come in surrounded by a male chorus costumed as huntsmen, singing a brief hymn to the goddess Ar-

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temis: "O thou divine, revered, our goddess most holy, seed of Zeus, hail to you, girl, daughter of Leto and Zeus, virginal, fairest of all . . . Hail to you, fairest of all on Olympus." As the singing stops, the hero, as we shall call him, steps forward into his role and addresses a prayer to the same divinity "Mistress divine, take this woven garland from my hands. It came from a meadow inviolate, where the springtime bee flits undisturbed through the waving grass. Chastity is the keeper of the place; she is the gardener, that waters it for those who are born wise forever to enjoy, but never for those who are not. The privilege of wreathing your hair is mine alone. We are companions, you and I, and walk together. Oh, may I end life's race as I have begun it."

Soon after this he leaves the scene, and does not return until nearly five hundred lines have been spoken, covering a third of the entire play. Brief as the episode has been, it has sufficed to project vividly upon the screen of our imagination a character etched in bright uncompromising strokes—a hero perhaps, but judged by the normal standards of Attic drama an unusual one. He has a personal commitment to sexual abstinence—the metaphors of the original Greek leave this in no doubt—reinforced by a preference for the unspoiled beauties of nature in the wild, and validated by an exclusive devotion—not usual in a polytheistic society—to a single divinity, the virgin goddess of the chase, celebrated by his company as supreme among the Olympians—an unusual judgment as applied to her—the object of a cult which excludes those who fail to meet the standard required—again unusual—and in which the speaker holds some kind of monopoly—most unusual. As we watch and listen to what happens next, we keep remembering him, for the new characters which now appear on stage create a situation which offers an explicit challenge—and a threat—to what he has stood for.

The dancing floor fills with a chorus of serving women singing a song of what they have heard about their mistress while washing clothes at the spring. She is in a mysterious and suicidal condition, the secret of which she cannot reveal, and has begun to starve herself. Has she neglected some necessary ritual, and is being punished by divine possession? Has she learned that her husband is unfaithful to her, and so is

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pining away? Has she had bad news brought by sea from her home in Crete? Or is her trouble more simply physical, a problem with the menstrual rhythm? They are women themselves and know from experience what this pain and distraction can mean.

On this cue, the center door of the proscenium opens to reveal the queen, recumbent on a bed, pale and exhausted, but not unattractive, wheeled on stage by her aged nurse and attendant, assisted by other servants. The nurse no more than the chorus knows the real answer to her mistress' trouble, but assumes the cause is physical, as she naturally would, given her professional role. Her charge has been exasperating, a prey to contradictory moods, inconsiderate, discontented and wilful; it is impossible to please her, "I'd rather be ill myself than look after you. Oh, what is life but love's labor lost! One would prefer death to this if one could be sure what death was!" These reflections are interrupted. The queen demands attention: "Lift me up. I feel so faint. I've got such a headache. Oh my slender arms—hold them up for me . . . How is my hair?" These words are spoken to the chorus. The nurse, as quick to sympathize as she has been to complain, tries to soothe her: "Bear up, my little one, don't take it so hard. We all feel ill sometimes. You just need to practice patience and fortitude." The queen responds by propping herself up in bed supported by the servants in order to recite or more probably sing a song of four rather wild stanzas in which she fantasizes: "Oh, if I could lie at peace in a meadow and quench my thirst with pure spring water. No! Send me instead to hunt with the hound, in the woods and the wild, tearing the deer's flesh, spearing their bodies, my hair flying in the wind! No, Artemis, it is you I want to race with, riding the race-horses over the sand. Oh I am mad. What have I said? Don't repeat it. See, I am crying. I take it back. Cover my head up again." The nurse has meanwhile responded antiphonally with stanzas of her own, which only reveal her puzzled bewilderment, until, as the queen exhausted sinks back on her bed, she does what she is asked to do, and replaces the coverlets. For herself, she lives in a different world and can make no sense of these extravagances. In this emotional pause, she mediates upon that traditional wisdom which exhorts us all to avoid extremes of feeling.

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The chorus interpose at this point to prompt the next step in the unfolding drama. "Find out from her," they say to the nurse, "what her trouble is." Despite the nurse's protest that she has already tried, they press their request. The queen after all is starving herself to death and the matter is becoming urgent. So the nurse turns towards her charge and tries again: "Is it a woman's trouble you have, too intimate for a male doctor? If it is, the chorus here can help you; or otherwise, why not a doctor? Please answer me if I am saying the wrong thing. Look at me, speak to me. Oh alas (turning to the chorus) it's no good! She is as stubborn as ever."

However, there is still one last card to play and turning back to the queen she plays it. "If you persist, you know what will happen. Dying, you will have betrayed your children. They will be ousted from their lawful inheritance by your husband's bastard, Hippolytus." As the name is pronounced, Phaedra utters an exclamation. "Ah," cries the nurse, "so that got home, did it?" Phaedra is forced to break silence. "You are killing me; don't, in the name of heaven, mention that man again!" The nurse naturally concludes that she has found a winning argument. Phaedra will realize the need to survive to protect her children. "Most certainly I love my children," replies the queen, "but it's not that kind of storm that fate has caught me up in." This prompts a teasing interchange of question and answer as the truth gets nearer and nearer. "It's not anything that I have done; if there is guilt, it is in my soul. Let go my hand, nurse, and leave me." So saying, she drifts back in memory to the past and to the dark legends of the Minotaur in the house where she was born. "Oh my mother and her disastrous love! Oh my sister, mated to Dionysus! And, I myself, third in the line of miseries!" The nurse recoils. What dark secret in this, a secret linked to the disastrous loves of her family? Better cease trying to learn the answer. But it is too late for that, for Phaedra now aroused asks the next key question herself: "Nurse, what is this thing that men call . . . love?" The nurse gives the inevitable reply: "It is a thing, of all things, most bitter and most sweet." "I know that now myself." "You mean, you are in love? Who with?" Brought to this point of crisis, the queen tries to pass the matter off. "Oh," she replies, "it's that somebody or other, the Amazon's child." The nurse is dumbfounded: "Hippoly-

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tus! Is that the name you pronounce?" and receives the rejoinder, "It is your pronouncement that you are listening to, not mine." So the secret is out, but managed with an affectation of carelessness, which transfers the onus for the revelation from a supposedly reluctant witness to a zealous cross-examiner. It also serves to cloak embarrassment; Phaedra has discovered herself to be in that awkward but familiar situation of the older woman infatuated with a younger man. For she is indeed hopelessly in love, the object being that youth who appeared on stage at the beginning of the play. But not only is he Hippolytus, an attractive youth, he is also her stepson; her passion is adulterous, and perhaps also incestuous. It makes an impossible tangle of her relations with her husband, Theseus. Hippolytus has been a son of Theseus by a previous union and his mother is now dead. Phaedra has since borne to Theseus young children of her own. She is not an autonomous individual, operating in a private world and enjoying relationships which can be freely chosen and freely rearranged. She is at once a queen with dynastic responsibilities, a wife, a mother, and a stepmother. The situation is disastrous, and nurse and chorus at once realize that it is. In turn they voice their passionate despair.

But while they exclaim and sing, the confession once made has time to work a change in Phaedra, returning her to a measure of sanity and self-control. She gets up, comes forward and delivers a set speech of some length formally repudiating, not the existence of an infatuation which she cannot kill, but any thought of indulging in it. She warmly defends the cause of marital fidelity and expands on the theme to attack the current laxity of morals in married women. The drama becomes a vehicle of social commentary in the style of Ibsen and Shaw. To her statement of the case, the nurse delivers a statement of her own in counterpoint arguing the opposite position. Phaedra's address has given her time to think. She admits she had at first recoiled from the revelation. But tenderness for her mistress combines with her worldly commonsense to argue that perhaps second thoughts are best. And second thoughts in this case point to an acceptance of the situation rather than its sublimation or suppression. A passion so profound, she says, must be yielded to, for

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sexual passion is a force of nature and she cites for support the common tolerance which society shows towards a degree of sexual freedom. Are not fathers tolerant of their sons when they sow their wild oats? Are not husbands tolerant of their wives' sexual adventures? The play at this point shows signs of turning into a problem play, a drama of ideas, of competing moral philosophies. The chorus acknowledge as much, perceiving a competition between what, all things considered, is expedient, and what is respectable, though in Phaedra's case painful. Phaedra's thought dwells on the issue of respectability. Civilized society can be ruined by such seductive ideas as those put forward. The nurse has no patience with this. "Stop preaching! What you need is not Sunday sermons, but a man! If your feelings were really and truly chaste, I would not have gone so far!" "Oh, stop," cries Phaedra, "of course you're right, but what you say is immoral. Don't go any further. Love has done its work on me. Don't make me give in." "Well," replies the nurse after a pause, "as you say, you musn't make a mistake. There's an alternative way of doing favor." She has at home, she explains, certain love charms—she may mean a drug—which if properly applied can assuage or relieve Phaedra's passion; that is, if she does not prove faint-hearted. But to make these work, she also needs to get from the object of Phaedra's love some sign or token—is it to be a word spoken, or something tangible he is wearing?—"The two conjoined" she says, "can then become a single favor done." What does she mean? That a message of some sort, carried from the loved one to the one who loves, and then said over again as the charm is applied and the two are conjoined, perhaps with the gift of a keepsake added—that this will perform the service of sublimating the fires of Phaedra's passion? or will it rather serve to bring the two lovers together? The ambiguity is deliberate, framed to suggest the covert pursuit of the second intention, while concealing it in the pursuit of the first.

The queen's response, contrary to the view of many commentators perhaps over-ready to protect her virtue (some would go so far as to remove the nurse's proposals from the text of the play) is cautious and reserved, and leaves something to be desired. She shows some curiosity about what the

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drug may be, but avoids pursuing the matter further, accepting the nurse's assurance that she will be "helped," whatever this may mean. "But mind you don't tell Hippolytus anything about this." This she says despite what she has learned, namely that some kind of approach to Hippolytus is inevitable.

The nurse replies soothingly, "leave it to me," and retires. The chorus, in tune with Phaedra's real feelings, sing an ode celebrating the power of erotic passion, a power which, however, destroys women who are its victims (a corresponding ode previously composed by Sophocles had celebrated its power to destroy men). What will happen next? The nurse does what she has to do. Whatever it is, it is done offstage. The action swiftly reveals how fatal are its effects. There is an outcry without. Hippolytus is heard denouncing the nurse as a pander who would betray her master's bed. Phaedra, listening, exclaims, "Now I am undone. Death is my only remedy!" Not only is her guilty secret betrayed; the violence of Hippolytus' reaction threatens her with public exposure. Only suicide can save the situation.

As she says it, the hero so long absent from the action enters or rather erupts on the stage in fury, while the nurse on her knees supplicates him to remain calm. She succeeds in reminding him that she had sworn him to secrecy. This oath she had apparently extracted from him before saying anything to him. And as a solemn oath, it is to prove decisive for the future action of the plot. He reluctantly assents that he has indeed promised to keep his mouth shut but he then launches into an extravagant denunciation not only of women but of the sexual instinct and of the sexual act: would to God we could acquire children artificially, in temples, shall we say, where the gods might deposit them for us; would to God we could be rid of women altogether from our houses; they are the source of fundamental corruption and continual unhappiness. Once again, rhetoric is used to dramatize a social philosophy, gaining some dramatic plausibility from being put in the mouth of a character already delineated (at the play's opening) as something of an extremist, on the extreme right let us say of the moral majority, and now suffering personal shock.

He may have to keep his mouth shut, he adds in conclu-

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sion, but just wait till the guilty pair have to confront his father. He will be there too, watching and waiting for them to give themselves away. He then quits the stage as abruptly as he had entered it. The message he has left behind is simple: woman is the enemy. The chorus overwhelmed accept the message on behalf of their sex, and lament it in four short verses of lyric grief. Phaedra, distraught, wildly exclaims: "How can anyone stand by me now, in an enterprise so immoral? Me, most unfortunate of an unfortunate sex? My passion has put an end to my life!" After a short pause, the chorus not very tactfully observe that it is the nurse's plans that have miscarried. On this cue Phaedra turns fiercely upon her would-be helper. It is not a pleasant scene. The nurse pleads that her motive lay in her life-long loving care for her charge; had she succeeded she would have been commended for her skill. As it is mischance has intervened. But there is still time to remedy the matter. Phaedra's sole response is to revile her and heap imprecations upon her. "Get out. You still have yourself to think of. I can manage, and mean to." She has nothing more to say to her. But that is because her thoughts are elsewhere. Confronted with the danger of revelation, as she thinks, her first thought is for reputation, her own, and her children's. She will guarantee both by taking her own life under circumstances which she will be responsible for, but which at this point she refuses to disclose. To this end she in her turn must pledge the chorus to silence. They like the hero are to be rendered powerless to prevent the onrush of events which are to follow Phaedra's suicide. She then adds something else: "This too will happen; my death will also damn him—that other one! He need not think to triumph over my damnation. He will catch his share of the infection I have caught. That will teach him." Precisely what she means by this is only revealed later. In fact her words betray the fantasy she continues to nurse; they are a pair of lovers sharing the infection of a common bed and a common doom.

Death is in the air now, not one death, but perhaps two; death and hatred, and the destruction of the unwary. The colours of the drama are darkening. It is surely that which moves the chorus at this point, occupying the stage in the ab-

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sence of all three protagonists, and just before the fatal step is taken, to interpose a song, the first two stanzas of which seek refuge in a different world. Somewhere surely in this complex of passion and fear there must be a haven, a place of security and peace. If only life's journey might end in the fabled garden of the Hesperides. . . . Then they recall a different voyage, the real one, that had brought their mistress from Crete to Athens. It was a journey of ill omen from the start. It has been the means of her enslavement to an impious passion. Yes, she will get free of this infection; she will put reputation before love; but the price will be that she will hang herself.

No sooner does the song end than loud shouting is heard within. Phaedra offstage has done the deed. At the same moment, with great dramatic force, her husband, the king, appears before the palace gates, garlanded, just back from a visit abroad. No one is around to greet him, but he hears great lamentation. Has his aged father died, or one of his young children? No, reply the chorus, is it your wife; she has hanged herself. "Open the doors," he cries, and as this is done, falling before his wife's body, he mourns both her death and his own bereaved condition; like a rare and precious bird she has flown from his hand, he knows not why. But then he spies a tablet attached to her wrist. Opening it he reads what she has written: her chastity has been violated by his own son Hippolytus; so she has taken the only way out. His grief is replaced by rage; scarcely waiting to finish his reading, he strikes at his son, not with a weapon—the son is not even on stage—but with something magical and just as deadly. It is a promise and a power once given to him by Poseidon, his legendary father, a power to curse, and by cursing to kill. So the curse is immediately pronounced. The chorus beseech him to take it back, but he cannot. He replies rather lamely by adding a second sentence of perpetual exile. The boy will be punished, either by one or the other. Is he having any second thoughts about his over-hasty imprecation? Here, as in Phaedra's case, there seems to be a hint that moral decisions are hedged with ambiguity.

His son now makes his third entry on the stage, anxious to know the meaning of his father's cries. The body now lying

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between them tells him part of the reason; and he is somewhat bewildered by the spectacle when his father turns on him with a bitterness easily imagined and denounces him. Where the ethos of our culture would expect him to offer immediate comfort to his father, his own reaction is curiosity. Why on earth has this happened? He meets his father's mute gaze and pleads "Please explain."

Once more, a tense dramatic situation is used as the occasion for philosophical commentary, as Theseus, ignoring the immediate question, gives voice to a popular and conservative morality; exclaiming against an age which values the inventive intellect above good sense. If it were otherwise, we would be able to see the difference between the honest sincere characters and deceitful liars. It dawns on Hippolytus that he may be the object of these reflections. Has someone slandered him behind his back? Theseus waxes even more rhetorical and moralistic. The times are degenerate. The gods may have to replace this corrupt world by another. Only now does he come to the point. First turning to the chorus he bids them bear witness against this man who has violated his wife. At these words Hippolytus recoils before his father, who next turns personally and savagely on him, and seizes the occasion to vilify his peculiar monastic asceticism as a hypocritical pose concealing secret and immoral purposes. "Phaedra's dead body is a fact that speaks louder than any protestations from you. Argue if you like that insanity is a woman's problem, not a man's. It's a man's too when he is male and young and lusty. Go. Your banishment from my territories is total."

A denunciation buttressed by general reflection calls for a rebuttal in similar vein. The son feels himself to be on trial in a courtroom of public opinion and uses courtroom idiom to reply. His stance is Socratic: the intelligent are (like himself) an elite, who cannot win popular applause. "My first point is to assert, in spite of what you have said, that I am as virtuous as any man alive, a fact provable by my religious piety, and the moral standard followed by my friends, which requires friendship to be repaid by friendship without backbiting. As to sexual matters, I am a virgin and have a virgin heart. You don't believe me? Is it likely I would have fallen for a woman not particularly attractive? Did I aspire to your throne? Politi-

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cal power is not my style; it's not worth competing for, considering its risks. Athletic achievement, and the politics of a private citizen, offer a more satisfying field for ambition."

Only after thus completing what has been essentially a statement of a moral and philosophical position does the beleaguered hero come to immediate matters in hand: "I solemnly swear, by Zeus, by earth, never, never did I touch your wife, nor think of it. As to why she committed suicide, I have no idea." His own moral standards have prevented him from imagining what his total repudiation of what she stood for, not to mention his threats, might have done to her. And in all innocence he further remarks that he cannot understand why his father, if he really believes his own words, does not kill him rather than send him into exile. "Death is too easy a way out for you," is the reply. "Only the life-long misery of a homeless wanderer will be sufficient punishment." Despair seizes Hippolytus; he realizes what his own sworn oath of silence now means; the very gods who guard it safe are also destroying him who swore it. And under such a stigma, where will he find refuge? The thought that this is what his own father thinks of him brings him near tears; he apostrophises the walls of the house, if only they could speak and testify for him. At last in resignation he says a fond last farewell to Athens and leaves, calling to his youthful company to come and salute him and send him on his way. "You will never again see anyone like me" he says to them, "nor anyone more virtuous than I have been." Following his departure, the two choruses, male and female, companions respectively of the male and female protagonists, join in a meditative hymn: "piety may serve to divert grief but the estate of man is unstable, and hard to understand. One can only pray for good luck and good fortune and avoid extremes. But serenity is hard to find when one sees the brightest star of Athens and of Hellas banished by his own father's passionate anger." As they sing, their grief and protest grow more distracted. "O sands of the shore! O mountain track, where he used to race! . . . My tears are inconsolable . . . Why did your mother bear you? . . . The gods infuriate me! O Graces! How can you send him away innocent from his home?"

Their song has afforded an interval of dramatic time long

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enough for catastrophe to occur. The fatal curse which Theseus had invoked in the first moment of his anger now takes effect. The subsequent sentence of exile proves to be no substitute. By the seashore, as Hippolytus drives along guiding the horses which had learned to know him so well when he followed the chase, there occurs a kind of earthquake followed by a tidal wave, and out of the tidal wave there comes a mysterious monster which pursues the horses and strikes panic into them. Hippolytus is thrown from his chariot and fatally injured. A messenger brings news of these events, which, by Greek convention, take place off-stage.

The chorus redouble their lamentation; here is disaster heaped upon disaster. As for Theseus, his reaction is ambivalent, his feelings are mixed. He admits that at first the news made him glad, but now—"as I revere the gods, so also I must revere my son." In short, he recollects that he is a father as well as a husband. This disaster, he adds, "affords me no joy, but on the other hand it does not weigh heavily on me either."

But this mood swiftly shifts, as Hippolytus staggers on stage, fatally injured, barely supported by companions who are unable to control his agony. Protests against his fate are commingled with his cries of pain. "Zeus, oh Zeus," he exclaims: "behold my sufferings, mine whose devout piety and virtue are without peer." "And he cries out again that there must be some curse on his family that has done this to him. He knows he has not long to live. "Father," he gasps, "receive my body."

Theseus collapses: his remorse is complete. "Oh my child! And oh my miserable self! What are you doing to me! Can you forgive me?" The dying man has enough breath left to say, "yes, I forgive you freely." The father overcome at once by grief and gratitude commingled exclaims, "oh noble heart and pure! Do not desert me. Hold out and cling to life. I beg you." "No" says Hippolytus, "it is all over. Cover my face. Don't wait." And with this he expires. The father slowly does as he is bid, rises, and turning to face the audience pronounces the last obsequy, "O city and land of Athens, what a hero has been taken from you."

As I have said, this account has truncated the text of the play, in order to isolate its natural dimension from the super-

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natural. With the latter removed, the plot obviously makes the kind of psychological sense which appeals to post-classical expectations. What goes on is the result of an interplay between the motives, desires and mistakes of understandable human beings reacting among themselves, and in the course of their reactions pronouncing strong beliefs about the human condition. Even at this level, to be sure, the dramatist does not altogether escape reliance on the supernatural. There is the magic curse (granted by Poseidon) and the magic monster emerging from earthquake and sea (which incidentally are Poseidon's domain) and serving as the curse's instrument. We can, I think, accommodate these within our dramatic imagination as we accommodate the witches, ghosts, and magicians of the Shakespearian stage.

Having said this, one has to ask what kind of meaning lies behind this psychological drama? Or better, what kind of presuppositions about the human condition lie behind its construction? Suppose we grant it the status of a problem play in the style of Ibsen and Shaw. In that case, we expect social critique or commentary, preferably implicit, directed upon current institutions, for example the status of women or war or money in contemporary society. To give this critique dramatic force and meaning requires some assumptions about what is good or bad, right or wrong. The audience need not agree in their judgments but the judgments are formed around the assumption that right and wrong exist. If on the other hand the substance of a play is viewed as a concern with personal matters alone, then what the persons say and do on stage, however cynically or despairingly presented, as we watch invites from us some kind of moral opinion, which we form against the background of certain presuppositions about the nature of vice and virtue in human beings. Our response to the performance—and perhaps still more to the text if we read it—is still colored by what we instinctively feel to be good or bad, right or wrong. Can the *Hippolytus* in its human dimension be made to conform to similar canons of critical judgment?

The fact is, that it is so constructed as to evade them, whether as drama of ideology or drama of character. Over personalities that we would prefer to assume are morally responsible and over decisions and acts which we would prefer

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to judge as either right or wrong, it sheds an aura of ambivalence, of downright ambiguity. Instead of enlisting our emotions to follow a conflict between degrees of vice and virtue and exploiting our sympathy for virtue when it is endangered or overcome, the plot is so constructed as to dramatize the difficulty of knowing what vice and virtue really are. Phaedra, who betrays strong traces of narcissism, behaves in the play as a divided personality, almost schizophrenic. She is possessed by an infatuation which on the one hand she cannot manage to repress, on the other hand cannot afford not to repress. What is she to do? The conflict within her faithfully reproduces itself in her ambivalent responses to the nurse's suggestions. Are we to call her sincere or dishonest? Or are these terms irrelevant to her situation and condition? Her suicide and the message she leaves behind are conceivable as heroic in so far as they are designed to protect the interests of her children. Several statements in the text leave no doubt about this intention. But are they not also designed to deceive, by transferring moral responsibility from herself to the innocent Hippolytus, and also to revenge herself upon the man who has rejected her? Again the text leaves no doubt that this is so. Does she then die with honor unsullied, as the play asserts, or fatally compromised, as our moral sense asserts? For Hippolytus, the ambivalences cluster round the interaction between himself and his father. The plot as designed allows him no personal relationship to Phaedra. His motives are immaculate. The text again leaves no doubt of this. If he asserts his own integrity more than once, the assertion is backed up emphatically by others, and reasserted in the last lines of the play. He is not a prig but an idealist who prefers an ideal friendship with his male peers to any other form of association. There is a note of genuine simplicity, of innocence, in the way he responds to his father's accusations. We catch it when he wonders aloud why his father, if he really believes his own words, does not kill him instead of merely exiling him. This very idealism becomes its own enemy (as the text explicitly asserts). It has provoked his father's unmerited but understandable dislike, and this in turn explains why the father, under the stress and shock of his wife's supposed revelation, is so ready to have his son damned and destroyed. Had

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the son been a more ordinary kind of person, would the tragedy of his death ever have occurred?

Theseus is a more understandable character—an average, conventional man with what we would call normal healthy instincts. He has a deep affection for his wife, not unmixed however with affection for himself; his marriage has meant everything to him. It is precisely the strength of this domestic commitment which also assists in provoking the decision to pronounce the fatal curse without pausing for further evidence. He may later express ambivalence about this decision; he may even wish to replace it by a different one; but he cannot. The familial bond uniting him with his wife and his wife's memory has proved disruptive of another and perhaps superior one uniting father and son. This, and not Phaedra's fate, constitutes the tragedy of the play. In the end she is almost forgotten. The one figure that survives, comparatively unscathed, is the nurse—a fact not usually noticed by the play's interpreters. She does not so much survive as fade out. To be sure, she suffers her mistress' rejection, but is given no lines of protest or grief after this takes place. She just retires from the scene. Why is she allowed to do this, if not because she is the one character who remains, we might say, uncommitted to any ardent emotion or fixed belief? True, she too is her own victim, in the sense that the effect she aims at turns into its opposite. Even then, she is able to propose a policy of waiting, as an alternative which would in fact have averted the tragedy. Tides of emotion wash round her but leave her comparatively unscathed.

At its ideological level the drama's effect is equally dispassionate. The play is a problem play precisely because, as the characters mount the public pulpit, they expound social and personal philosophies which while mutually antithetical retain their own respective validities. It can be inferred that each represents an existing current of feeling within Greek contemporary society, as in fact is true in all societies which are monogamous and become urbanized. The *Hippolytus* is a drama of certain dilemmas which have existed in the consciousness of European civilisation ever since Greece founded that civilisation. In Phaedra's set speech we hear the voice of a "moral majority;" in the nurse's reply the voice of liberalism

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and permissiveness; in Hippolytus' rhetoric, a call to renounce the flesh in favor of the spirit, allied with a male chauvinist rejection of the female principle; in Theseus' sarcasm, the suspicion and dislike felt by ordinary folk for the extraordinary, the eccentric, the enthusiastic, the extremist.

Does the play, then, taken at the natural level, have any message in the modern sense? Judging from a majority though not all of surviving Greek plays, the Athenian audience of the fifth century appears to have had a developed taste for witnessing the fatal effects of collisions between equally matched antagonists and principles. The *Hippolytus*, viewed as this type of play, could be said to have no message, no moral meaning, or at least no "moralistic" meaning. Yet a meaning is there, satisfying I think to its original audience, expressible, where we might expect it, in what the chorus have to say in their last stasimon. They have been following the action with commentary, question, protest, appeal and mournful resignation; projecting upon the stage the reactions of the audience in their seats. The point has been reached where Hippolytus, lamenting the irreparable breach with his father, has just departed in despair to accept what he thinks will be a life of perpetual exile. The tragedy is not yet completed, but its completion is now felt to be inevitable. Precisely at this critical juncture the chorus step forward to deliver their last formal word, a kind of summing up. Its key note is sounded in the prayer they utter "for thoughts not unswerving nor counterfeit, and a disposition relaxed and always ready to adjust to tomorrow's time, and so with these as company to fare prosperously". This is what they wish for, as also for us who watch and wait.

Phaedra, Hippolytus and Theseus all get their due in these words. There is a middle ground between extremes, and a middle measure of emotion and of will, if we could find it. The means for attainment would seem to be not in heroic purpose, or resolute conviction of certainty, but in an effort of discrimination which pauses long enough to discern ambiguities in apparent conflict and seek their reconciliation. This is an intellectual exercise. The text of the play tells us several times that it is, and exposes what happens when the exercise is defeated.

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II. THE DRAMA OF NECESSITY

So far we view an estimate of the *Hippolytus* which depends on an act of dissection, removing the supernatural actors in the plot. One can say that the play, with its strong flavor of psychological and social analysis, is composed in such a way as to encourage this, and so produce a result agreeable to the tastes and expectations of a post-classical audience. Yet measured against the original intentions of Euripides such a dissection surely becomes an artificial exercise. The paradox of the *Hippolytus* lies in its double vision of the human condition, at once autonomous and yet not autonomous, of personalities at once free and yet not free. To appreciate how the play interweaves these two levels of perception, one has to consider first the stage setting.

The proscenium presents the front elevation of a palace, with a central set of doors, or a gateway. On either side stands a shrine containing a statue, one representing the goddess Aphrodite and the other Artemis. Each is costumed and painted (including eyes, hair and complexion) to represent the respective roles assigned to them in the Olympian pantheon. Artemis carries her bow and quiver, and is clad in a short skirt in a posture ready for the chase; conceivably a hound or hounds accompany her. We may imagine Aphrodite to be richly clad, embellished with personal ornament, and probably accompanied by her child, Eros. Each figure gains formal dignity from the architectural setting in which it is emplaced. The text of the opening episode takes care to inform us (following the established convention which supplies verbal scenery and stage directions) that both statues are there: Artemis is presented with a wreath for her hair, and a prayer offered to Aphrodite is addressed "to your statuary." Both chorus and actors from time to time in the course of the play invoke the goddesses in the vocative. The natural pose on such occasions would be to turn towards the appropriate shrine, and there are other occasions when they may gesture towards it. The usual effect gained in a Greek theater would be that of action transacted in theatrical space between and in front of these two divine beings. Their looming presence presides over it. They are there always; the human actors come and go.

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This effect is reinforced by the intrusion into the action of utterances by two divine voices, one of Aphrodite at the beginning, one of Artemis at the end, and by two hymns sung by human voices, one addressed to Artemis at the beginning, one to Aphrodite near the end. The responsive symmetry of the composition is comprehensive and unmistakeable. The play in short employs language to supplement vision in gaining from the audience an attention, focussed on these two divinities, which is to be sustained throughout the performance. What the audience sees is combined with what it hears, and this can be done convincingly only if it is assumed that the respective utterances emanate from the appropriate shrines. Classical dramatic convention would suggest this, either by allowing the voice to proceed from an unseen actor concealed behind the statue, or, much more likely, by allowing an actor costumed appropriately to appear in front of it to speak for it. The effect produced would be familiar because it was oracular. At Delphi, for example, the god's shrine and image was there to see, and a human voice spoke for him. In the case of Artemis, the text indicates that the speaker in her role performed an exit after addressing Theseus and a re-entry to address Hippolytus. The actor who speaks for Aphrodite is given a line which interrupts what he is saying in order to announce his departure. It reads like an actor's interpolation made in a period when the personalities of professional actors rather than their symbolic roles began to attract the interest of post-classical audiences.

Scholars and critics have been reluctant to accept the full implications I am offering here of the sparse logic of high classical staging. In particular they prefer to imagine the voice of Artemis as disembodied, presumably because it is first addressed by Hippolytus as "a divine breath of fragrance." Prostrate on the ground he asks "Is the goddess Artemis present here?" and she replies "yes" whereupon he lifts his gaze to her and exclaims "You see me, do you?" and she again replies "yes." To render the source of this voice invisible, even though it engages in extensive conversation with both father and son, it has to be transferred to a lofty position "in a cloud" (so Gilbert Murray) or on the palace roof (so W. S. Barrett), so that father and son can discourse with it from a lower position in the manner in which Hebrew proph-

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ets or Christian saints are allowed to converse with the deity. It is difficult to avoid seeing in this preference an attempt to interpret classical drama by the light of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. In polytheistic society, idols were a fact of daily life. For monotheism, as already observed, the supreme being is by definition invisible.

The closeness with which these two rival powers engage with the personalities of Hippolytus, Phaedra and Theseus would be felt all the more directly by the audience because the shrines are domestic. The family lives in the house to which they are attached and passes them daily in their comings and goings. Hippolytus has been unwise enough to choose one of them as his favorite, and so can claim a monopoly over the ritual at her shrine, an inexplicable claim if the shrine were in a public place. In his last moments he even reminds her of his role as "guardian of your shrine." Phaedra's last words state that "on this day and hour" she will fulfill the pleasure of Aphrodite, by departing from life and escaping from love. The statement is worded as a ritual acknowledgment of and tribute to the power of an irresistible presence in her own house and at her side.

The play in fact does not open in the accents of Hippolytus, exalted, joyous and serene. The prologue strikes a very different keynote. As the audience gather in their seats and settle in silence to watch and listen, they hear a voice. One of the statues is speaking:

> Manifold is my power through all humanity and men have a name they call me by.
>
> My title is divine. It is Kupris. My power stretches from heaven to earth.
>
> All people that do dwell between the Pontic sea and the bounds of Atlas and see the light of the sun must bow before this, my power, and I do then have regard for them.
>
> But if their thought despises me, I bring them down.
>
> For the divine family, like the human, has the following property:
>
> To receive honor at men's hands is what gives us pleasure.

The audience were hearing the voice of a deity whose cult they commonly observed, no doubt with varying degrees of devotion. In modern editions of the play, her name is printed

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at the head of the text as Aphrodite, and so she is styled in the handbooks. In four of the mediaeval manuscripts, the name is omitted. Kupris, "the Cyprus-girl," is the only name she gives herself, and the only name by which her shrine is identified or addressed throughout the entire play. The choice of the name has not attracted the attention it deserves. Being so consistent, it must surely be deliberate. By associating her with Cyprus, a chief seat of her cult, it carries the suggestion that though her shrine on stage is local, the power it represents is not. It is pan-Hellenic, indeed cosmic, as her words have stated, and when Phaedra's nurse later suggests she should consider yielding to her passion rather than repressing it, her most compelling argument consists in a restatement of the status of this cosmic power or life force. This is the goddess of popular and essential sex, dominant over all living things, symbol and strength of their universal pursuit of sexual fulfillment. She can bless and protect and she can also overthrow and kill. It depends, she says, on how we react to her and the voice proceeds to describe in factual terms her plans for destroying a youth who has been so rash, so misguided, as to spurn her worship.

We should remember at this point that Greek religion was one of allegiance and cult, not of belief and dogma. To acknowledge the divinity of sex is to accept its existence in your life, not to hold opinions about its theological basis or moral propriety. To reverence Kupris is to serve her, accepting the fact that at times you submit to her influence. In a sense, you become like her. At the very least, her ritual, like all other ritual, involves some reenactment, some symbolization of those pressures and processes in human life which she represents. The crime of Hippolytus in her eyes is not simply the omission of outward ceremony, but also the refusal of emotional empathy. In Phaedra, on the other hand, we view a reverse relationship, one in which the goddess has virtually taken possession of her.

Describing her plan to destroy him, Kupris likewise describes the course of the plot. Phaedra is to be her instrument. Nay, indeed, she has already become so. But passion for Hippolytus in this case cannot come to fruition. It can issue only in death, for Hippolytus is to die, and so Phaedra

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must die too, though her death is incidental to the main purpose. She is to be the means to the end. She will, however, die with her honor unsullied. This much and this only, the voice guarantees. As for Theseus, he is to be the second instrument of this plan, for he happens to command a secret weapon, namely, the magic power to cast upon a person a fatal curse. This magic was once given to him by his own father, Poseidon, and he is going to be put in such a position that he will use it against his own son, Poseidon's grandson.

"But I can see Hippolytus approaching," says the voice. "Little does he know that this day will be his last."

During these words, our eyes have been drawn irresistibly towards the shrine on the left, the shrine of the goddess of sex. As Hippolytus enters, he turns toward the right and our eyes follow him towards the shrine on the right, before which he stands or kneels, to make his simple offering of a floral wreath. As we turn to him and hear him sing his hymn and address her, we confront on the stage, and as it were also in our own hearts, a different allegiance, a devotion to an ideal, of masculine virtue at its most spiritual level, coupled with an obsession with moral purity and a fastidious rejection of sex. Hippolytus prefers men to women—there is no doubt of that. He can even claim a "virgin heart." The ideal is a highly civilized one—perhaps over-civilized. It represents an exaggerated form of what the Greeks called *sophrosyne* and *gennaiotes*, thoughtful self-control and high-mindedness. Both qualities appear as his in the language of the play. But the ideal's existence is not located exclusively in human personality, but externalized as a powerful presence which confronts its rival. Are they to be reconciled in some pantheistic scheme of universal harmony? No! They are, always and forever, enemies. Artemis in her summing-up explicitly so states. How, then, can man live with such warring competitors for his piety and allegiance? Hippolytus has no solution, but he has a humble companion with him who, after the ritual to Artemis is over, invites him to pay brief tribute at the Cyprian's shrine, as well, on the other side of the stage. Hippolytus contemptuously spurns the proposal and leaves; it will come as no surprise when he later attacks and rejects the entire female gender. But his companion who has shared in the ceremony to

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Artemis, lingers behind for a moment and pays his own brief tribute to the shrine of Artemis' rival, asking her to forgive the rash young man. Gods can afford to be more intelligent than men. The prayer, as we have already been told, will be unanswered.

The presuppositions behind the play have already begun to emerge. Man's moral universe is not entirely under his control, nor is it really a universe, informed by principles in harmonious relation with each other. Such a formula would be Platonic, but the Greece that preceded Plato was innocent of this kind of philosophic certainty. Rather, what we live in is an area of forces which compete for human allegiance and a man is unwise to choose among them too stringently. Let him propitiate as many as he can, but in due measure, within proper limits, and so keep sane and walk unharmed. In these two opening episodes the speaking voice of Kupris is matched against the presence of her rival who is not less eloquent for being silent. Her votary speaks both to her and for her. In the concluding episodes, this contrapuntal arrangement is reversed: the Cyprian is spoken to and Artemis speaks. Hippolytus has fallen and is dying; a messenger reports the news.

Whereupon the chorus launch into a hymn. But it is not, as we might expect if this were to be treated as a purely personal tragedy, a cry of grief or a dirge for the dying. Instead, it is a hymn of worship to Kupris addressed to her shrine. Her sexual power it is that bends gods and men to her will. It soars over earth and sea. Eros casts his spell over all the animal kingdom and over all human kind. "Yours, oh divine Kupris, is the lordship over all these creatures, and yours alone." For the third time, the theme of her cosmic power is elaborated.

No sooner is this name enunciated, than Artemis enters the stage to play her balancing role. Theseus' repentance does not in fact occur as a personal response to his son's agony. That is how it would have been played if the play had obeyed the restriction which would confine the action within the human and natural dimension. But that is not the play as Euripides wrote it. Theseus is not to be allowed this emotional luxury—a romantic luxury. As the son had to answer to Aphrodite, and be punished, so the father has to answer to Arte-

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mis, and be punished. The new voice now heard comes from the shrine on the right. It identifies itself by name to make sure that we now attend on her. Speaking, she says, for all whose pleasure is in virginity, she asks Theseus how he can derive satisfaction from killing his own son as a result of listening to his wife's falsehoods. His conduct damns him utterly and separates him from respectable society. After going on to explain the details of what has happened, she condemns him for misusing the privilege of the curse that his own father had given him: it was not meant to be used to destroy the grandson. However, he can be excused in so far as it was the Cyprian who contrived the plot in which he has become enmeshed, to satisfy her own resentment. She can do this because all gods are autonomous in these matters and have to practice neutrality towards each other. "Otherwise, but for my fear of Zeus, I would not have avoided the reproach of failing to rescue one who has been so loyal to me, so irreproachable; the gods do not enjoy seeing their followers perish." In this way the voice from her shrine confronted as it is by the shrine of her rival, is constrained to offer a kind of rationalization of the relationship between them. Zeus, it is implied, represents some overriding authority under which the spheres and influences of rival powers in the cosmos are parcelled out and preserved, each in its own province. The conception is Homeric.

This is a fact of life, and Hippolytus like his father has learned it the hard way. As Artemis' votary, and at the point of death, he is allowed brief communication with her. "You have made a marriage," she pronounces with fine irony, "but your partner has been calamity. Your own high breeding has destroyed you." When he asks "Can you see me?" she replies "Yes, but it is not proper for me to shed a tear." He reminds her that she is losing her worshipper and acolyte. "Yes," she says, "it was the Cyprian who meant it to turn out this way." "Oh," he exclaims, "I now sense the spirit that has destroyed me!" "Yes, you offended her honour; when you kept your senses, it made her angry." This comment is worded as a pun. "In fact," says Hippolytus, "I now realize that one female (sc. a goddess) has destroyed all three of us." "You are right," replies Artemis, and she itemizes who the three are.

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Nothing could be more calm, collected and dispassionate than the consolation she affords him.

The son in his last moments turns to commiserate with his father, who laments his own condition as a man lost and destroyed. "That's enough," says Artemis, interrupting their grief. "You can at least have the consolation of knowing that in reprisal I am going to victimize one of the Cyprian's men (she refrains however from giving details), and she brandishes her arrows as she says so. And there will be a second compensation, she adds. Hippolytus dying will himself become a cult, the hero of all maidens who on the eve of marriage, as they say farewell to virginity, will cut off a lock of their hair as an offering to him. He will be Hippolytus of the Bridal Night, recipient of the memorial song sung by the virgin choir as the bride says goodbye to her parents' home: "Phaedra's love for you will not go unremembered." The ceremony described in these words could be interpreted as a symbolic commemoration of an innocence intense and protected while it lasts, which in maturity is laid aside. That, indeed, is why Hippolytus has to die.

Father must still reconcile himself to son, and son to father. Each accordingly receives a mandate from her to do this. The formality completed, she bids her votary goodbye and departs, for he is at the point of death, and her immortality cannot allow itself to be contaminated by proximity to mortality in its death throes. "Goodbye" he replies. "We have had converse together for a long time, you and I. How easy it is for you to end it! But since I have always listened to you, I freely forgive my father."

The remainder of this closing scene, which allows the son to expire in his father's arms, is transacted within the purely human dimension already reviewed. The play in truth, taken as a whole, is bifocal. On the one hand, it deploys a series of intense personalities who as they interact on each other seem to destroy each other. The motives that collide are theirs. The decisions made are theirs. The perceptions of reality are theirs. The words that do the damage are the words they speak or in one case write. Yet, on the other hand, everything they feel and do is continually represented as responsive to two opposing power centers, if that is the best way to describe

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them, existing outside them, outside their human personalities, embodied in two supernatural personalities. In the end the protagonists are treated as vehicles through whom these purposes are expressed. What are we to make of this double vision of the human condition?

If the dramatic meat of the play is perceived to consist in its human dimension, the temptation arises to dismiss the divine apparatus as an unwanted intrusion into an otherwise acceptable plot—acceptable, that is, from a modern realistic standpoint. The intrusion, we further assume, occurs only as a concession to certain polytheistic beliefs still popular at the time of production but primitive in character and having only an antiquarian interest now. Second thoughts suggest a different view of the play's composition and intention. At the human level, as we have seen, moral decision is dramatized as complicated, uncertain and difficult, liable to produce results which are self-defeating if carried to extremes. The same decision-making process is then portrayed as taking place within an arena marked out by superior powers who set the rules for what takes place and in effect control the results of the decisions, directly or indirectly. The stage setting with its two shrines and statues visually reinforces this impression. May there be logical connection between these two—between the complexity of human decision on the one hand and the control exercised by the external divine apparatus on the other?

If in the course of human life choices are forced on us which are difficult to make and involve results which are uncertain and possibly disastrous (the nurse and Phaedra) or which are made with righteous moral conviction and resolutely pursued, only to end in moral and physical collapse (Hippolytus and Theseus), then the conclusion follows that influences, causes or forces of some kind, external to our decision-making process, exist and weigh on us in order to produce the said results. We think we are free, but our freedom is conditioned.

The two goddesses speak as persons; they are as we say anthropomorphic. It is being suggested, however, that they do not represent a mere indulgence in superstitious fantasy, still less a veiled protest against superstition voiced on behalf of the dramatist. Greek polytheism performed a functional role

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within Greek culture, as a symbolic projection of what we would designate as psychological and social forces operating impersonally upon the lives of men in society. It stood for whatever it is that from time to time seems to take charge of us and produces effects which are unforeseen or beyond our control.

In the *Hippolytus*, Euripides exploits this machinery of projection. In Phaedra's case, Aphrodite can be interpreted in Freudian terms as symbolic of a purely psychological obsession deriving its power from levels of her unconscious which have been stimulated to a degree beyond conscious management. Artemis otherwise could be taken as the projection of a psychological obsession of a different order. This habit of externalizing processes which we would characterize as internal, incorporating them in divine personalities, is as old as Homer. For the Greeks it was a device which had the advantage of recognizing the existence of the unconscious and its power in human life. In the case of Phaedra, Euripides exploits this to the full. But the personalities of the Greek pantheon can also extend themselves into a second level of symbolic representation above the psychological, namely the historical. It is in this external context that Aphrodite and Artemis function to embody the web of circumstance in which Hippolytus and Theseus become entangled. Aphrodite in the prologue becomes the mouthpiece of prospective history tracing an inevitable sequence of events in which the results of any decision which is going to take place at the human level are conditioned by what has already gone before. Artemis, tracing for Theseus what had happened before he arrived on the scene and what he has then contributed himself since his arrival, becomes the voice of retrospective history, laying down the previous sequence of cause and effect within which our immediate decisions have been made, and which helps to settle what the effect of our decisions will be. The Homeric god likewise provides the model for this kind of historical symbolization.

Drama has to deal with personalities, not concepts, and can hint at this view of the human condition only indirectly. It is easier for the novel to do so directly, as in Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. To do so directly is dramatically difficult as can

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be seen in the example furnished by Hardy's *Dynasts*. But I think the effect is there in all Greek tragedy of the high classic period, in the fateful determination of the plots employed. The *Hippolytus* is exceptional only in the poignancy of its personifications.

It may be that, if in the present generation there is any revival of interest in Greek drama, it is because we discover within ourselves some sympathy with its double vision. A complicated view of the human condition is congenial to the circumstances of the twentieth century. Two world wars and the possibility of a third concluding holocaust appear to reinforce the high classic lesson not only that the course of human affairs is unpredictable and dangerous, but that moral certainty is no sure guide to survival let alone happiness. "We," using the pronoun collectively for the western world as it was about the year 1900, started out so assuredly, so confident of our moral convictions, our ideals, our progressive purposes—only to be shattered, in the generations that have followed, in the course of pursuing these very purposes. Like the Greeks before Plato, we have been forced to see ourselves and our history as in a glass darkly.

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FREDERICK BUELL

Concerning Starlight

Concerning starlight, I sincerely doubt that when it shines
on a countryside new crested with snow it is aware
that it is so beautiful: and I imagine that most
would, in the matter of this starlight, agree. But not so
with the winter moon. One must ascribe
rather more consciousness
to her shining, and imagine that she likes her own
pale reflection
on the frozen country fields; and perhaps even more likes
the way that she will, in a stand of leafstripped woods,
highlight those solemn shapes, skewed as they are
out of the snowcrust.
And the moon is so whole and pale as she fills
the sky, without regard for any who have braved the less
than zero degree
frosty hush to be there below, alone, with her.

Well, I have a particular affection for the moon
in her state of firmamental shining; she is more
beautiful to me
than the majority of women; I will leave the warm
stove in any home
simply to see her, against the side of a mountain, come,
so impervious to the rocky cold, streaming down.

But saying this I want to make it clear I will have,
like anyone,
the propensity to love warm shelters, a snug place,
a night when,
with someone who is rather more to one than a friend,
one feels
encouraged by the whole hush of the landscape to a great

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unconstrainedly detailed and unhastened expression
of loving;
to the peerless indulgence of a warm down comforter,
a fourposter bed, and a cozy room that is gradually chilling
about the two of you curled up in each other's arms,
a cozy society under a thick quilt, all the more there
for the tang of the frost rimming the windowpanes,
perhaps the moonlight even shining in making
from this perspective you feel extremely glad
it has come to confirm you two in your solitude,
in your warm nest, cupped together whispering
and playing with the soft hair at the base of the neck,
growing ever more so languid and heavy with the rich
sleep that thickens in the room as the air chills,
and arguing with each other about who
will have to get out in it first in the morning;
a languid sweet heaviness of the eye and limb
(so different from the taut exhaustion
those with less genius for enjoying themselves experience)
that even, as it grows more seductive, you resist,
not wanting to sacrifice even the last minutes
of that pleasurable concord, and the moonlight
so cool and evocative on the sash and chair; oh
there is no way at all I wish to underestimate it,
going to sleep with all that reluctance and languor
full of nothing but the warmest regards for such winter
midnights.

But nonetheless, no matter how delicious that is,
there is something, perhaps still more potent, that
one can do by way of using those subzero nights.
There is nothing that is quite so ravishing
as, when sensible people are responsibly in bed,
cracking open the storm door, and, in warm
clothing to be sure, stepping out
onto the snowcrust at the darkened housefront;
and already, right before the door, the snow
is aglow with her pale ivory; and the darkened house
now behind you seems comically unnecessary,
one thinks why in hell do people want to sleep inside them.

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For on the snow, on the ice, on the shagged
  tree branches, the
moon is so exquisitely, gorgeously, purely shining,
and to walk out across, onto the slope of a field,
above which that great cool satellite, shining full
has utterly free play—oh that, that is wonderful;
how could one ever be alone then? How could you ever
with your great friend in the heavens?
Oh how, when she fills the entire arena of the snow
crusted fields, and when she shines likewise down
  so particularly
upon you out where you have exposed yourself—
where you have come out to her as you might to an old
lover in whom, though you have had god knows how
  many since her,
the peace and acceptance of all you have gone through
  shines,
and who possesses this night as she will future ones
the peculiar benediction she has and always will
  have for you,
always there in the heavens for you when alone.

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JAYANTA MAHAPATRA

Again the Rain Falls

Again the rain falls on my earth
without a murmur,
where mute waterfalls bleed
over the years of my youth.

The last flight of winter cranes
has taken time away
as an answer. Only
voices of the dead filter down the stairs.

My room is bare, and outside
the young bamboos bend into the wind
and the rain turns in silence.
A young man who resembles my son

is out there in thought, in open green,
planning his own garden.
Rain stands on the margins of my time,
a discovery, like theft,

making me careful how I lay the hour down,
looking at the trees growing too large
for my little yard, filling with lurid light,
and I hardly see spring coming in.

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The Wind

The sky darkens. The afternoon wind
drifts through the lanes of this ruined town
and wrecks the images on the placid river
that holds the sudden terror
of a man falling into frigid depths.

My eyes are getting used to the dark.
From time to time
my old father comes at me
with outstretched arms of judgment
and I answer from no clear place I am in.

Beyond, the bare necks of rice
sway in the shadows of Orissa's villages,
the leaves of rain-trees collapse,
and the weak in mind look on helpless
at the afternoons lying bound at their feet,
and at the dark fruit pulling down the trees
of knowledge with their weight—

And now in a dream I hear someone's laughter
and it's no longer the same. In the wind
which carries the ash, the smoke, the odor
which finally settles on the skin
like rain on the funeral grounds of summer;
as the wind twists and turns,
rising like flowers of fierce color out of the ashes,
like dreams strangling the hearts of old men
who feel they were always born old, and the voices
of water inside them come back again and again
as a sound of their dead mothers' weeping.

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Love Fragment

for Panna

Footsteps approach along the courtyard;
across the days your unknown face
measures mine with a creeping friendship,
and I put my heart away so you cannot see,
climbing the mountains on foot
as I tremble to their earth, carrying
the fire farther to choose the manner of my life
that must light up the darkness of my hour.

It is November, and I can ask for more,
because I do not know you even in memory,
and my need touches new hands,
but the bells ring
in your faraway summer heart
under your sleeping breasts,
perhaps to begin a little dance of time
that's caught with my few unspoken words
as they bow their heads over your awakening.

My mind sweeps on ahead, but there are
no secrets to tell. Glazed with sun and air
your eyes blossom on an aging man's glance
in the middle of a dream's square. A warm wind
of footsteps that drapes me in the years of youth,
a spring day again at the beginning of winter.
And I take you into my heart,
a country that will settle down to another day,
pale and worn and hungry for darkness
by what I do not know.

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J. B. GOODENOUGH

Revaluations

When the rails say
The train is coming
Though still out of sight,
Still unheard,

My children put
Pins or pennies
On the warm metal,
Back off, wait.

When the last car
Is gone down the line
Pins and pennies
Remain for them:

Thinned, elongated,
Not good for much now,
And yet worth
Infinitely more.

Old Man Fishing Cat Swamp

Grey trees rise from grey water:
Your rowboat lies in mist
Moored by its still reflection
To currents you no longer remember.

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The pale reeds do not stir
Mirroring themselves; you
Cannot see where the shore is,
Where the lake leads you.

There is sleep in the sound
Of oar drifting in oarlock, of
Wood rubbing on wood; you let
The rod hang heavy, line slack.

You cannot find your way back:
Once there was a reason to go back:
You have lost it. Memory bites,
But slips the hook, and is gone.

EMILY HIESTAND

This Is Something Simple

This is something simple—tangerine peels
shredded on the counter like rocking saucers
with butter-white insides and bits of string.
But for some peculiar reason the skins
remind me of Handel speaking of his 'Messiah':
"I did think I did see all Heaven before me."
These peels are the shavings of Heaven,
certainly not the orchard agape with music
of spherical fruits, but still, real relics,
fragrant and recently of the Garden.
I stare at them hard, up close, as though my eye
were to a keyhole. What could Handel have seen?

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Perhaps what Dante saw in the blinding visions
of Paradise—light unfolding unto light,
and the one millisecond—as we might say—
of Pure Illumination. Or perhaps
something vast and geographical
like the landscapes of Frederick Church—a spectacle
of chasms and plateaus, and always a river—
a shining serpentine leading to . . . My God,
even the needles on the promontory pines
are absolutely realistic, with flecks
of sunset on each tip. You have to admit
there is something appealing about a gigantic vision.
But sooner or later, the visions all seem to go
to something so brilliant it can't be described save
as blinding light in hyberbole after hyberbole—
with cymbals, shrieks and releases of doves.
And another thing—after the levins of Truth,
mystery remains . . . much the same as the anecdote
of the trolley and the village clock,
supposed to explain relativity, but itself
so mysterious as to require explanation.

Myself, I look at these peels and work from there.
Say these fruits and the television, the Rockies,
Hiroshima and easter eggs and Orion,
and Peter finding arrowheads at the lake,
whooping at the luck of each sharp blue edge,
which he could hold in his hand easily
as lunch money—say all of it could be connected
by me or a greater mind—there, you'd have it!
These are pleasing skins. What nice ruddy color.
Now they'll go in the compost, then to the garden
and tomatoes will grow next year if the Spring isn't wet.

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CHRISTOPHER HOWELL

Albert Darby's Letter to John

Down at Winston's General Store & Feed
& Pharmacy we worked, winters
after the crops were in. Those days, Johnie,
are the ones I know
best from having called them back
so many times. Umbrellas, bicycles, sacks of beans,
and rack on rack of Moxie; we hefted
and tagged it all, talking softly
of girls, baseball, our prospects in the world that opened
to us like a hidden door. 1910. What did we know
then? Strong backs and hearts would serve
to make our good lives last and grow
we thought. That was before you got on
with that slaughterhouse in Scranton
and I went for the mines. Fine young men,
at fifteen we brought back real money
to our dirty rooms and sealed it up in jars.
Those jars never filled, though, did they?
There were fees, fines, layoffs
and the company store. There were bars and fights
and girls and finally hopeless, bitter wives
and baby after baby and never enough to eat.
Strikes, then Johnie, wasn't it? Debs, Hill, Big Ed
Winchel. Remember Pittsburgh? Pinkerton men
standing in the blood? We should have stayed
in old Sweet Afton, Johnie; married local girls
and fought Ward-Whitson Power instead of every
cussed breath, and every shame. No point
to it now, though. You're probably dead
and I'm fool enough to mail this anyway.

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BENJAMIN SALTMAN

The Russian Movie

He remembers a white sky, snow,
and a forest of birches.

Cold and sadness mixed,
he can taste the snow. The scene is beautiful

though it smells like an old theater,
a comfort he never wanted to leave.

The bitter taste of snow, Russia,
and subliminal flashes of cannon . . .

Of course! Napoleon's invasion!
The horses will be cut down in the forest.

The camera moves among the trees
accompanied by the feathery hiss of the soundtrack.

A mind guided and disembodied
envisions horses on their backs kicking.

The birches seem to struggle to speak
and not to be used this way by the camera,

by the political imagination.
The stumbling movement, the impression of helplessness

and crime. This is what he remembers,
how he must always leave the theater

and walk out to the street
to put on the weight of lights like chains.

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MARCIA B. SIEGEL

Couples

PETER MARTINS' NEW *A Schubertiade* came at the end of the New York City Ballet's first long season without George Balanchine. It turned out to be a romantic ballroom-ballet with lush, intricate partnering that shows off the company's splendid reserves of dancers. Martins hasn't yet struck me as a choreographer with anything pressing of his own to say, and he does nothing new in *A Schubertiade*. Yet the idiom in which he casts a set of well-known options employs a kind of extravagance that Balanchine avoided for all but the most compelling occasions. The choice of theme and style for this ballet has to be significant: what Martins does artistically as Balanchine's successor in these initial years will be read as a statement of how the company intends to carry out its pledge to keep the master's spirit alive. Nothing can be surmised yet, except that they're going for broke.

Couple dancing in the ballet is now a highly conventionalized image, and a universally popular one. Beautiful ladies in long swirling skirts are attended by ardent gentlemen, and the music sweeps us up into romantic motion. Everyone remembers the dance floors of adolescence, so this is one of the few situations in classical ballet where the audience can have a real reference to what the dancers are doing. The type was probably fixed in the 1930s and 1940s by Leonide Massine, whose costume ballets *Le Beau Danube*, *Gaîté Parisienne, Vienna—1814*, *Symphonie Fantastique* and others evoked nostalgia for Europe's crumbling social order—the ballet equivalent of Lehar's operettas.

Despite the success of Massine's ballroom ballets and their many imitations, George Balanchine had seized much earlier upon both the dramatic and the virtuosic possibilities of fusing social dance with the classical pas de deux. From descriptions in the encyclopedic listing of Balanchine's choreography issued by Eakins Press (1983), he may have begun these explorations even before he left Russia in 1923, but there is at least a surviving fragment from the 1932 *Cotillon* that shows him already far along on this road. The "Hand[s] of Fate" duet, preserved in the repertory of the Tulsa Ballet by its directors Roman Jasinski and Moscelyne Larkin, who learned it in the Original Ballet Russe in the forties, is simple and mysterious at the same time. The man and the woman apparently are only dancing a Chabrier waltz. But the tone of oddness, established at the opening when the woman is seen with both long-

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gloved hands covering her face, is not dispelled by the rhythmic intimacy of their dance. In fact certain dramatic gestures intrude suddenly—I remember once the man pulling away and shielding his eyes as if he'd seen something awful—without breaking into the flow of the dance. These gestures, unprepared for and unstressed, become part of the dance's step vocabulary, reinforcing the aura of strangeness. They are not "signature" or mime actions, they're not there to create character or embellish an ordinary social dance form. They seem, rather, to grow out of the dance form and belong to it, like a fungus on a tree—organic but disturbing.

Often later on, Balanchine allowed the romantic impulse to exert its power, leading his couples into wonderfully enigmatic situations—forebodings of death and corruption (*La Valse*), visions of Paradise (*Emeralds*), conjurings of lost lovers (*Vienna Waltzes*, last movement)—all without any prior indication of character or plot. But this aspect was not Balanchine's primary interest, however good he was at it, and it was pursued more thoroughly by Antony Tudor, who could erect whole social structures upon a glance over a partner's shoulder or a hand raised in farewell, and by Jerome Robbins, who heightened the gesture to the status of a virtuosic act.

Balanchine led the way too in ever more elaborate reworkings of the pas de deux's introduction, adagio and coda format—transforming the ballroom into a showcase for dazzling partnering displays laced with spectacular lifts, balances and counterpoint. *Liebeslieder Walzer* (1960) was and is the great exemplar of this genre. With couple dancing now back in vogue, contemporary choreographers like Jiri Kylian and Glen Tetley may dispense with the ballroom trappings, but they too rely on the unstated premise of romantic love. Otherwise the athletic convolutions they've invented would look like wrangling and manipulation.

Peter Martins has taken all this heritage to heart in *A Schubertiade*, even the Massine, and has come up with a ballet that is sumptuous, beautiful, and technically admirable, and that somehow makes you wish there were less of everything the longer it lasts. The scene is an 1830-ish drawing room in what I imagine to be a wealthy Viennese suburban house. A pianist (Gordon Boelzner) sits in a charming windowed alcove and supplies continuous ländler and waltzes by Schubert for the eight dancing couples at a party. Later the set breaks away and turns into a formal garden with the piano installed in a little Grecian pavillion.

Although great pains have been taken with Federico Pallavicini's decor, unquestionably the most beautiful and well conceived I have ever seen at NYCB, the illusionistic detail it embodies is not carried through in the action of the ballet. As though only the right architecture and a few courtly stances were necessary to sustain the period and place, the ballet proceeds as a succession of display pieces—duets and trios mainly, with a few larger ensembles and brief solos.

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Taken on the level of realism established by the mise en scène, the party should be about dancing, everyone dancing. Instead, everyone seems to have urgent business elsewhere. While one couple at a time goes out on the floor, scattered individuals watch idly from the sidelines. We have no idea how well any of these people know any of the others. We glimpse them only in attitudes of conviviality or passionate floods of dancing.

Bart Cook and Heather Watts have a serious, meditative early duet; they seem darkly involved with each other. Yet they end their dance and go off in opposite directions. Ib Andersen and Joseph Duell strike up a rivalry over several different women. Which one they win seems to matter less than their getting the best of each other. Nichol Hlinka and Jock Soto are young, playful, literally wrapped up in each other. They finish, move to the sidelines, and the current of warmth and animation between them is completely quenched by the time she sits on a chair with him stationed at her side. Martins seems to be saying there's no bonding between any of these pairs, just momentary attraction. They change partners, ignore the people with whom they apparently came, look devastated by small inattentions and ignore brushoffs. Stephanie Saland dances the only extended solo in the ballet, a melancholy, almost tragic cry, perhaps the lament of a wallflower. Because somehow she hasn't got a partner. But this is unaccountable because she's clearly the most beautiful woman in the place, and later three men cluster around, begging for just a smile.

In order to make enough variety for nearly an hour of dancing, Martins casts the dance numbers in different moods. But the intensity of relationships that characterizes the dancing drops away, and the lovers melt into anonymous fixtures surrounding a new set of dancers. I admit to feeling had when a ballet sets me up for a dramatic situation and doesn't deliver it. *A Schubertiade* lacks dramatic unity in the same way the old-fashioned story ballets do. Martins has choreographed character skillfully, and it's disconcerting to realize that it's only a device.

After the change in setting, the party metaphor disappears almost entirely. A pit orchestra begins to play the longer, more dramatic Fantasie in F Minor. (This jarring switch, from intimate salon music to full stage sound, was remedied at a later performance when Schubert's original four-hand piano version of the piece was restored, with Jerry Zimmerman materializing beside Boelzner in the gazebo.) Dancers return two or three at a time, now in streamlined versions of their party clothes, and dance some more exaggerated dramatic dances without any pretext of showing us who they are and why they're attracted to each other. The extended, melodramatic entrances and exits, the excited bendings and twinings, the inspired lifts and complicated partnerings eventually lead into a

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completely formal finale with all 16 dancers paired up. The other principals were Maria Calegari, Kyra Nichols and Sean Lavery, but I can't remember who ended up with whom.

Twyla Tharp doesn't specialize in dramatic dances at all; her subject is usually style. Yet it's she who's inherited the Balanchinian genius for inferring character out of dance gesture. Unlike Martins and Robbins, she doesn't have to apply character on top, because her dance is so directly whatever it is; human contradictions and failings are built in along with human heat. Tharp's is a dance of events, sequences of swelling and subsiding mastery, approach-impact-dispersal, a tide of thrilling circumstance out of which the human authenticity emerges almost uninvited. Her dances don't have storylines or literal characters, yet she has given me some of the most profoundly joyful and profoundly disturbing moments I've ever experienced in watching dance.

In her recent work Tharp has been developing three quite different strains of choreography: a purely musical exploitation of dancing (*Telemann*, "The Golden Section" from *The Catherine Wheel*), a continuing romp through the popular music of the twentieth century (*Nine Sinatra Songs*) and, I think most important, a dark, often violent probing of the modern situation (*Bad Smells*, *Fait Accompli*). All these attach to facets of Tharp's own creativity—her classical braininess and musical intuition, her knack for style and the Zeitgeist, and her seeming conviction that there's a longstanding enmity between the artist-individual and a predatory social system. Tharp is a loner, both unique as an artist and unapproachable as a dancing persona. Yet she pushed herself toward contact, leans over the brink of togetherness. Sometimes the results are engaging, sometimes they're chaotic and alienated.

Her struggles to socialize herself—that is, to function in a more and more inclusive social universe—are an ongoing subtext in her choreography. The progression was evident this season at Brooklyn Academy. In *Eight Jelly Rolls*, dating from 1971, when she still had an all-female company, tuxedo-clad women assume what are traditionally male roles—jazz musicians and barroom drunks—in the unself-conscious manner of girls' school theatricals. *Sue's Leg* (1975), a quartet incorporating what were then the only two resident males, comes from her fooling-around period; men and women compete playfully, collapse on each other and gently shove each other away, and join in friendly tumbling and showing-off. By the late seventies and *Baker's Dozen* (1979), the company was larger and more accomplished technically; the dance is suave and amusing, based on an acute sense of coordination in partnering that can only occur in a finely-tuned ensemble. She's built this virtuosic teamwork into the sublime speed and skill of "The Golden Section" (1981); and into

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the seven sets of ballroom personalities in *Nine Sinatra Songs* (1982), where each couple has its own particular relationship embedded in a different dance-floor style.

Apart from its sheer danciness and wit, *Sinatra*, the most overtly romantic of Tharp's current dances, gets its charm from the fact that each couple is individual. The dance is meant as an exposition of dancing types. It's airtight, distanced. Like many of Tharp's dances, it's grown sharper and less subtle since it was made. I first saw it in fall of 1982 on the West Coast, and two major changes have tipped the balance of the dance, making it more of a comedy than it was originally. On the Coast Gary Chryst substituted for John Malashock in the tango "Strangers in the Night," with Mary Ann Kellogg. The incomparable Chryst was able to commit himself totally to the dance's reckless glides and stops, its extreme swivels and switches of focus, so that however bizarre the pattern was, you could see that it all contributed to his and Kellogg's mutual seduction. Malashock, back in the part created for him, is unable to take it seriously, and turns the eroticism into camp. Then, the naive waltz "I'm Not Afraid," for Richard Colton and Christine Uchida, has been scrapped. Uchida left the company, and now Colton dances a cute but also arch "Somethin' Stupid" with Barbara Hoon. These changes, and some less obvious ones, have made the whole dance coarser and less emotionally wide-ranging.

The audience, of course, is always ready to take Tharp as a great joke, and before *Sinatra* had run five minutes almost every move caused hilarity. Perhaps neither Tharp nor her audience can tolerate serious sentiment for long. When she danced an adaptation of four of the Sinatra numbers with Mikhail Baryshnikov on the last night, she seemed uncomfortable, even awkward. She couldn't seem to find a persona for herself as a conventionally feminine type who could wear a smashing Oscar de la Renta gown and high heels, and dance with the most sensational partner in the world.

Yet, in her more androgynous guise—and the more egalitarian roles she's made for the company—she's capable of sexy dancing. And it's the darker pieces in the repertory where Tharp is truly erotic—*Short Stories*, *Bad Smells*, and the new *Fait Accompli*, and even in the neo-expressionistic, cartoon sections of *The Catherine Wheel*. Tharp has discovered how to use real sensuality in partnering, rather than the airy, pictorial semblance of it we usually see on a ballet stage. Natural rhythm and the sense of body weight are essential components of Tharp's movement style, and when she began to explore partnering, she allowed them to come into play.

Several years ago on one of her television tapes Tharp said she hated to be lifted, it made her sick. From then on she seemed determined to overcome this weakness, and her choreography has accumulated an extraordinary number of duet situations and solutions. Whoever is being lifted or swung or supported—this happens

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to men in Tharp's work as well as women—permits the full force of his or her weight to fall on the partner for a moment before rebounding or suspending. Often in a lift the women will intensify her weightiness while changing position in the man's arms, transforming acrobatic strength into embracing or caressing contact. Women launch themselves full-out across huge spaces and land securely in the men's arms. The floppy fall that's come to be almost a Tharp trademark can be a pleasurable giving-in, a sign of willingness to accept help.

In the middle of her long, astonishing *Fait Accompli*, to David Van Tieghem's electric rock score, Tharp dances with all eight men in the company, creating a whole lexicon of male-female support images of which she is the center. For a large part of this sequence she's carried, manipulated, slung around by groups of the men. They handle her protectively but always leave her casually, on her own two feet. She dances duets with several of them. With Raymond Kurshals she has a sort of disjointed prize-fight; they throw punches, lunge for each other, miss, grab, clinch. With Keith Young she's harmonious, balletic, supporting him as often as he supports her. She keeps falling as if in exhaustion out of Tom Rawe's arms, and he pulls her up so they can go on dancing a routine together. Each man leaves her after a while and she's finally alone.

As a whole, *Fait Accompli* might be about this duality of Tharp's—the need for other dancers/people to surround and support her, and the need to fight out her most personal battles for herself. Except for the section just described, the dance is completely formal, with the company working in strictly designed groups, displaying their technical prowess, their athleticism, and their ability to turn themselves into mechanical monsters with equal preciseness. The dance is frequently grotesque, the movement aggressive and fractured. The dancers grimace and gesture without evident cause, always in close coordination but spread slightly apart, as if they had some substance on their skins to repel all aliens venturing near. At other times, it's theatrically beautiful, as the dancers advance from an upstage void beneath banks of harsh sports-stadium downlights, and scatter again into nowhere when their dance is played out. Lighting designer Jennifer Tipton has surpassed herself here, with slanting, cathedral-like beams, fogs, projections. One change was so dramatic Tharp left the stage empty for it, and the audience burst into applause.

After the middle section, Tharp leads the men and the women in another front-facing, formal movement sequence that seems to contain references to some of her other dances. The others leave one by one, and Tharp is alone, shaking, gesturing, stretching, with such a severe intensity she seems almost spastic by the time she grinds to a stop in ballet's first position, with a tortured grin on her

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face. Then she turns and makes her way with a tight strolling step away from the audience toward that now-familiar void—only a row of footlights has come up and she's walking straight for them.

Critics differed about the meaning of this dance, and especially about the final image. I don't see any reason to take it as a sign of Tharp ending a career, as some have. It could as easily have been an affirmation of challenges yet to come. Nothing in the season showed any sign she's slacking off.

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STEVEN MILLHAUSER*'s latest book is *Portrait of a Romantic*, published by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

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JOHN QUINN* is a teacher at Daido Institute in Nagoya, Japan, and is working on a series of poems about the disappearance of the Kalapuya Indian clans of the Willamette Valley.

ERIC A. HAVELOCK has chaired the Classics Departments at both Harvard and Yale. He is the author of several books and is now Sterling Professor Emeritus of Yale.

FREDERICK BUELL's most recent book of poetry is *Full Summer*, published by Wesleyan University Press.

Asterisk indicates a new contributor.

JAYANTA MAHAPATRA lives in Orissa, India, and edits the literary magazine, *Chandrabhāgā*.

EMILY HIESTAND* studies poetry and painting at Boston University and has recently exhibited at the Van Buren/Brazelton/Cutting Gallery in Cambridge. This is her first published poem.

BENJAMIN SALTMAN teaches at California State University, Northridge. His most recent book of poems, *Deck*, was published by Ithaca House.

JAMES FINN COTTER is a professor of English at Mount Saint Mary College in Newburgh, New York. He is the author of *Inscape*.

DON KLEINE teaches English at the University of Maryland.

HERBERT LOMAS lives in London. A book of his poems, *Fire in the Garden*, was recently published by Oxford University Press.

DANA GIOIA is a businessman-poet who lives in Bronxville, New York.

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VERNON YOUNG

Of Mice and Wolves and Hounded Men

WITH A SINGLE EXCEPTION, the best films of 1983 derived their emotional force from the actor. The exception is a noble experiment by Godfrey Reggio which should be hunted by all professed connoisseurs of the medium. *Koyaanisquatsi* (the Hopi term for Life Out of Balance) is a brilliant attempt to eliminate the normal components for which audiences go to the cinema: the acting and the story. Reggio's essay is narrated by spectacular images fused with importunate musical motifs (the creation of Philip Glass) that depict, by inference, the victory of urban industrial civilization over unmanned nature and the prediction, far from novel, that we shall infallibly destroy that civilization and return to the state represented in the opening shots by rock paintings that predate the Hopi.

As a thesis there is much question-begging here. The images that introduce this montage-without-words (magnificent in themselves, especially the cloud-shadows speeding by way of time-lapse photography across the sculptured plateaus of Monument Valley and the San Juan Gorge) give way to ordered farmland and thence to the ordered chaos of the contemporary city. Reactions to these transitions will vary with every spectator confronting them, since we are shown no other form of society, no other way of life—only a sublime nothingness of sand shifting over sand and the sun setting on a thousand leafless pinnacles. If, misled by the elemental attractions of geology, you reflect that an earth empty of humanity is preferable to one dominated by it, you will thereafter accept Reggio's evidence of the impersonal car-choked city as an unqualifiable disaster. In which case you will need to excuse a systematic falsification achieved, for the most part, with helicopter shots which of course reduce mass man to the sum of his design *as seen from on high*, funneling himself down his highways in toy-size machines, an antlike creature with no visible purpose beyond fleeing one crowded artery for another.

Reggio set himself a difficult problem. How do you show at length and without words an allegedly dehumanized society preparing its own extinction (we glimpse the nuclear bomb's debut, a file of armored tanks and several nightmare implosions of mass housing) when you have rejected, as a necessity of your scenario, any political alternative that might suggest an opposing will among

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these legions of ants? How do you photograph and synchronize order beautiful to the eye (cities by night in which symphonic streams of cars become serpentine rivers of light) and offer it as the emblem of our death? At the halfway point, Reggio understandably becomes over-involved with his own method, the rigorously chosen visuals of Ron Frick as clock-measured and as depersonalized as the dazzling rituals he is deploring. He asks us to take on trust simplistic conclusions about doom implied by premises he has not pictured. This is no catastrophe; a poem is not synonymous with a law-school brief. Dismiss the argument or escape into silent reservations. *Koyaanisquatsi* is a sort of film-making to be encouraged; it is *aesthetically* uncompromised; with high-tech finesse it restores the purity and excitement of multiple images in motion, the foundation of this peripheral and much abused art.

Never Cry Wolf (an independent production happily given distribution by Walt Disney Pictures) can be said to suffer (not irredeemably) from a like division between purpose and execution. Intended as a comic treatment of the primal setting in which an ill-suited man proves his mettle, the setting, imposingly *there* (as it couldn't be in Farley Mowat's book), challenges the facetious approach. Which may be why in no preview, display ad or quotation from a reviewer was there a suggestion that *Never Cry Wolf* was a comedy! Evidently the sponsors had last-minute misgivings about audiences accepting the struggle of one unfit man against the Yukon wilderness as a subject for fun. But for most of the film's length, the director (Carroll Ballard) and a virtually unknown actor with a flair for understatement (Charles Martin Smith) convince us that it is, even while we shudder at the appalling loneliness of those Arctic latitudes in which a dutiful and timorous ecologist equipped with a canoe, stacks of government forms in triplicate and a food supply of canned asparagus is instructed to find a wolf and investigate his habits.

He finds one—"I'm supposed to observe his behaviour but all he does is to sit in front of his lair and observe mine"—and his deepening relationship with this animal, *en famille*, becomes an adventure in empathy that inevitably modifies the strategies of farce. Long before that the man, a bemused outsider at his own ordeal, has pronounced himself an insignificant speck in the polar waste. (From Reggio's helicopter he would have been a speck devoid of personality!) Right there, comedy is imperilled. It *is* recovered, yet before the film ends the man is in fact given heroic dimensions and two enemies. Against expectations, the wacky pilot who dumped him in the territory to begin with and a young personable Esquimau are transformed into predators for whom the only profitable wolf is a dead one.

The producers wanted to eat their ice and melt it, too. Nonetheless, the movie is on most counts compelling: that landscape, fit only

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for God, wolves and caribou; Smith's off-track ruminations, always adroitly timed. And if you don't think his mice-devouring sequence is as hilarious as anything you've seen in movies I'll personally eat a grilled mouse for your delectation in the office of *The Hudson Review*.

The Grey Fox (from Canada) is also about survival. (On second thought all these films, one way or another, are about survival.) Not as ambitious as either of the foregoing, the tone of this one is more consistently maintained. So improbable is the real-life story of its origin that tongue-in-cheek was the only level at which it could have worked as a captivating movie. In 1901, Bill Miner, pushing sixty, whose principal identity before spending 33 years in San Quentin was that of a stage-coach robber, was released into a world where the stage-coach had vanished, and with it his civil qualifications. Nothing daunted, he took to robbing trains instead. Bungling his first job he was forced into flight; he changed his name to Edwards, eluded the American law and crossed the border into Canada. Securing new accomplices, he perpetrated, in 1904, the first train robbery in Canadian history. (Should I assume it was the last?) Eventually he was captured—politely—by the Northwest Mounted Police; post-eventually, according to the movie, he escaped from prison and lived happily ever after with a tiresome woman whom he met while living incognito in a Canadian small town.

Richard Farnsworth, another little-known actor, though he has been in the business for forty years (earlier, as a stunt man), does the fugitive robber with a rare blend of authority and mildness; he gives commonplace lines a surprising resonance: as when, embarrassed by his affectionate reunion with his sister, Jenny, he observes apologetically, "I guess I *have* aged some." Phillip Borsos, director and producer, is distinguished by the economy with which he establishes an incidental character, such as the man who sells Miner a Colt 45. And in no more than sixty-five seconds the home-guard brother-in-law reveals effectively the source of Jenny's desperate hope that her brother will settle down with them. She in turn is played so winningly by Samantha Langevin that her disappearance from the story is a major disappointment, the more so as the other actress, Jackie Burroughs, has no competence whatever.

Nostalgia is the governing sentiment. Although the age of molestation was well under way at the turn of the century, Frank Tidy (on camera) frames his locomotives, snaking down a canyon leaving vapor clouds in their wake, or gleaming and panting in the still of night, as if to remind us that for many the coming of steam was no ill omen but the dawn patrol of an age of promise.

It is no accident that *The Big Chill* opens with an infant playing in a bathtub. To take a harsh view of what goes on in this film, one might say that the thirty-year-olds who are reunited by the death of a mislaid companion of their "radical" days fear, more than any-

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thing, the process of growing up. I prefer not to insist on the harsh view because the juvenility displayed is a national trait which has often, at least in the movies, the unquenchable asset of vitality and, in this instance, the welcome crunch of wit delivered by an ensemble of actors who will speedily and for two hours disarm you quite. Alex, whose funeral service in a Southern town (he had committed suicide) six old friends have attended during a long weekend, may have been a genius who took too many detours or just another Sixties dropout with confused pretensions about his opposition to the credit-card society (the big chill of the title) and who couldn't settle for more as the uneasy six have done. (We never find out how much of which he was!)

In a milieu of Spanish moss and Southern Baptists, the remorseful clique tries first and unsuccessfully to spare itself the candor that would expose its compromised existence. Sam the actor is for a while the only one who isn't acting, but as the hours grind on, one by one they let their hair down to confess that they don't live with themselves, or their work, or their mates, easily. What makes all this diverting is the absence of self-pity or heavyweight argument in Lawrence Kasdan's script; he also directed, with a sinewy hand. His editing is a model of how to interrupt a feature-length conversation with rhythmic passages that change the pace and re-charge the air. To this end he enlists the energy of rock music, belted out by The Rolling Stones, The Beach Boys, the Temptations and others you'll know better than I. Since the lyrics are canny guide-lines to the script, the result is a high-spirited wedding that should have you dancing out of the cinema—else you're older than I am! *The Big Chill,* in short, is too ominous a title for the reconciliations that largely define the weekend. (*Not My Funeral* would have been a better one!)

As for the actors, they perform as if they'd lived together for years (how would I know differently?): Jeff Goldblum, Kevin Kline, William Hurt, Glenn Close and etcetera. How can one nominate *supporting* actors or actresses when, as these do, they react in unison like a school of fish? That Kasdan soils his record with a liberal sprinkling of four-letter language is a pity. And he does try to persuade us that sexual consummation alone will knit up the ravelled sleeve of care. That's a beautiful thought to take home but I'm not convinced that it happens often to the right ones at the right time.

In recent months it has been refreshing to see so many movies about nice people; it leads one to believe they exist. Gowan McGland of *Reuben, Reuben* is not nice-people but Tom Conti will reward you for the deficiency; and if you're a moralist, you will rejoice at the comeuppance he invokes. We're on familiar ground here (we of the quarterlies); we've all known the poet who is never going to forgive anyone because he hasn't written a publishable line in five years. McGland has replaced verse with New England wom-

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anhood which, in this version of the Peter De Vries yarn, is thickly populated with round-heels. You don't need to detain yourself for long by scenting the resemblance of McGland to Dylan Thomas. McGland is low-keyed and secretly vicious; further, he is unpressed and unshaven, he is a liar, a thief and a cadger. How many of the latter Thomas was I don't know, but he was considerably more exuberant and I can't believe he was calculatedly vindictive. I found myself wondering if in truth an abundance of females, young or middling, would find McGland irresistible. I was quibbling on a cloud. They would if he had the actor's style and comma-perfect Scots delivery. Conti is a disturbing cad; he has interludes where you are ready to forgive him everything *except* his poetry! There is a thoroughly unnerving closeup early on, after the scenes that set him up as being unscrupulously on the make, when, back in his room, he stares into nothingness, into a great darkness inside, fearing yet knowing how far he will contemptibly go. That look has to earn him whatever compassion we are inclined later to award him.

I've heard complaints that the ending is contrived. Of course, it is, elaborately, artfully, from the beginning. Whatever else the film may be—all but entirely Tom Conti's triumph, I'd say—it is the best Shaggy Dog story ever brought to the screen!

After seeing *Reuben, Reuben* I had not expected Conti's performance to be surpassed. If I say it was, in *The Dresser*, and appear to be making an invidious comparison, I mean that the context of this work places greater demands on its principals, not that Conti would be incapable of rising to the demand. The role of the director here, Peter Yates (unappreciated for *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*, overrated for *Breaking Away*) is not as eminent as that of Ronald Harwood, the writer, or of Albert Finney and Tom Courtenay; without him, of course, we'd not have them in this stunning combination. Not genius but tact was required for transferring Harwood's concept and the inexhaustible powers of Finney and Courtenay from stage to motion picture. To me, the experience was a thunderclap that left me shaken for days; even now, after a second visit, I don't feel equal to conveying the unmitigated pity and pain and incredulous admiration to which it incited me.

What do we find here?—a second-rate Shakespearean actor, tyrannical and demented, making his last appearances at the end of his tether; so divided among the parts he has played, so hounded by unacceptable reality (the *Luftwaffe*, the sirens and the rubble) that without the indulgent counsel and the nursemaid firmness of his antic dresser, Norman, he doesn't know, on stage or off, who he is. From where we watch he is a vessel of *ersatz* eloquence and shocking ingratitude; he is fitfully heroic but more often terror-stricken; to his audience, he is a luminary; to his jobbing actors, a god or an arrogant upstager.

For all that, he *is* Lear, with more than his share of Cordelias,

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wording his way, attended by his fool, across the heath which is England under the Blitz. No one-to-one correspondence is called for. This is a drama of echoes and a political one is, if I mistake not, omnipresent. The actor is addressed only as Sir and he is fighting the fact with poetry. It happens to be Shakespeare's; he could as well be promising his audience that he can offer it only blood, sweat and tears. He is the old order at bay, its language, at least, intact.

If you find these dimensions untenable, stay with what you see, the theater and, no argument, two phenomenal actors. Albert Finney has entered a territory of self-effacement so far breached only by Olivier. Tom Courtenay is superlative beyond belief. Within the camp framework of his character, he masters a Lancashire accent, yet is fifteen different voices within any given speech. Histrionic by faggy nature, Norman has been for so long the confidant, the manager and the clown of his master, his every effort expended in anticipation or in repair, that he has been all but dispossessed of himself; he is an anthology of the personae he wears to mollify his lord and her ladyship. When he addresses the finally stricken Sir, habit prevails: "We're not dead, are we?" Of the many lines in Courtenay's volatile and headlong recitations, another, equally piercing to me, came at the end when after his momentary tirade to the Stage Manager, he resumes authority undercut by deadly disbelief. "This is no place for death. I had a friend here."

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JAMES FINN COTTER

Illuminated Books

BOOKS OF ILLUMINATED BOOKS, in partial or full facsimiles, and books about such books have been proliferating in recent years. Exhibitions of illuminated manuscripts, especially from the Middle Ages, have also increased our appreciation of this art form, and handsome catalogues offer permanent pictorial records of the events. No art form is better represented in a book than the book itself. What is a unique inaccessible manuscript can, through modern photography and printing, become an object of study and pleasure for many. Even if the whole book is not reproduced, open pages in color may provide the enjoyment of a private showing. The isolated leaves of the *Très Riches Heures*, shut in private splendor, now turn to the touch of anybody's fingertips thanks to the popular facsimile published here by George Braziller. The Musée Condé in Chantilly, which owns the original, displays the reproduction rather than the revered object itself, kept safely in a vault. Most people, gazing awestruck into the glass case, are not aware of the difference.

In his study of medieval illuminated manuscripts, Robert G. Calkins expresses his reservations about this making of books about books.[1] Reproductions are never the real thing. True facsimiles, such as those printed in the *Codices Selecti* series published in Graz, Austria, are prohibitively expensive, while partial facsimiles and general books present only the most beautiful miniatures, often neglecting to include the facing page of text or decoration and providing little sense of the sequence and context of the illuminations. Calkins' book intends to impart to the reader an awareness and feeling for the book as a whole by introducing various types of manuscripts as coherent objects that were adorned for use in particular ways. The author chooses examples of Bibles, Gospels, liturgical books for Mass, Sacraments, and Divine Office, and books for private devotion. Wherever relevant, he reproduces facing pages in sequence while concentrating on one work at a time, using such models as the Lindisfarne Gospels, the Pericopes of Henry II, the Drogo and Metz Sacramentaries, the Windmill Psalter, and the Breviary of Charles V. Except for the twenty-four color plates, the illustrations appear close to the passages where they are discussed so

[1] ILLUMINATED BOOKS OF THE MIDDLE AGES, by *Robert G. Calkins*. Cornell University Press. $48.50.

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that the reader may view the pictures while perusing the text. Calkins is a skillful guide through the maze of different kinds of books, and one learns much about words and worship from his explanations. He surveys the history of illumination and includes many of the masterpieces, the Book of Kells, the Utrecht Psalter, the Echternach Golden Gospels, and the *Très Riches Heures*, so that one is well prepared to see any single book as part of the whole tradition. His is a rational approach to a complex subject and one wonders why it has not been taken before; it should be followed hereafter. In future editions, evident typos need correction, and some errors of fact: in the frontispiece of the First Bible of Charles the Bald, St. Jerome is not shown "back at Rome" since he remained in Bethlehem and translated the Bible there.

Calkins is an art historian who employs some of the methods of codicology, the science that examines the makeup of a codex as a whole and in all its parts, the size and format, arrangement of leaves in gatherings, preparation and type of script, text and illumination, and binding. John Harthan, former Keeper of the Library of the Victoria and Albert Museum, has written a concise introduction to the subject in his survey of illuminated books in the museum.[2] He also manages to put much additional information in less than fifty pages, covering manuscript production, workshop procedures, religious and sacred texts, and the historical development of illumination. The basic elements, the script, the initial, the miniature, and the border, receive careful attention, as do the methods by which a manuscript was made. While admitting that our knowledge is still incomplete, Harthan insists that the simultaneous presentation of text, script, decoration, and illumination was usually a collective enterprise from the early Middle Ages onward and that specialists traveled to work at various locations. Later, lay ateliers in cities like Paris overshadowed the monastic scriptoriums. The number of painters grew steadily and, although some are known by name, many remain anonymous, identified only by recognizable styles in widely diverse manuscripts. Harthan's book contains some thirty illustrations, mostly in color but in reduced size. One fine full-page reproduction—without its opposite leaf, however—is a page from the Missal of Saint Dennis Abbey, completed in Paris around 1350. The Gothic script in brown and red inks, the capitals decorated in patterns of blue, red, and gold, the pictorial initial O with its hunting scene, and the two grisaille miniatures along the bottom of the page—all bordered with foliage, butterflies, birds, and a monster—make this illustration an ideal exemplar of the beauty repeated a thousandfold in medieval manuscripts, shut away securely for centuries and now revealed through photography.

[2] AN INTRODUCTION TO ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS, by *John Harthan*. Stemmer House. $9.95.

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The luxurious catalogue of a loan exhibit of Renaissance manuscripts from the British Library allows those who saw the items at the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Pierpont Morgan Library, or the British Library to recall or deepen their knowledge and permits those who did not view them to possess an important monograph in an area of art too often overlooked.[3] Three major schools from 1450 to 1560, Flemish, Italian, and French, are surveyed respectively by Thomas Kren, Mark Evans, and Janet Backhouse, and the selections from the exhibit are then discussed separately in each section. Color reproductions are given for the twenty-five manuscripts and detached leaves on display, and numerous related works appear in black and white. Double pages, closeup details, and individual leaves offer plenty to look at while the authors supply a wealth of information about the painters and workshops that created a new life for the hand-made book at the very time printing was revolutionizing its production. The two flourished side by side for a century, and some publishing houses dealt in manuscripts as well as printed books. Certain books were designed to be hand-illuminated and a few were even hand-copied after being printed. While we know names of Italian painters like Cristofano Mayorana and Giovan Pietro Birago, and French painters like Jean Fouquet and Jean Bourdichon, Flemish masters remain mostly unknown. Some of the most famous miniatures must be attributed to the Master of Mary of Burgundy, the Master of James IV of Scotland, or the Master of the Prayer Books of c. 1500, hardly memorable names. Two of the most important artists, however, are known and represented in the catalogue, Simon Marmion and Simon Bening, both innovators in landscape painting. In fact, the earliest examples in Flemish art of pure landscape—a nonnarrative scene with views of nature rendered in spacial recession—are found in illuminated manuscripts. Two excellent reproductions from the exhibit show Marmion's miniature of St. Jerome kneeling amid lush green trees and bushes and Bening's December scene depicting hunters against a backdrop of bare branches and pale far-off mountains. The treatment of borders is another major innovation of the period, the Flemish miniaturist creating an illusion of flowers, vines, and insects as three-dimensional frames through which to peer at an inner scene. In reverse, the border may depict a distant scene while the text hangs like a suspended scroll before the reader's eyes. This tension between intimate reality and vast space holds the reader who is invited to enter wholly into the book, page after page, vision upon vision.

One of the items featured in the catalogue, the Hastings Hours, has now been reproduced in a lovely partial facsimile.[4] Attributed

[3] RENAISSANCE PAINTING IN MANUSCRIPTS: Treasures From the British Library, ed. *Thomas Kren*. Hudson Hills Press. $50.00.

[4] THE HASTINGS HOURS, preface and commentary by *D. H. Turner*. Thames and Hudson. $45.00.

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St. Catherine of Alexandria, Hours of William Lord Hastings, Ghent, late 1470s.
Collection of The British Library.
Photograph courtesy of The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

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to the Master of the First Prayer Book of Maximilian (perhaps Simon's father Alexander Bening), the book of hours was first owned most likely by William Lord Hastings who was beheaded by Richard III in 1483. Probably made in Ghent in the late 1470's, the original manuscript consists of 300 vellum leaves with twenty-eight full-page miniatures each surrounded by ornamental borders and faced by a text page with similar margins, together with four half-page miniatures and seven text pages also with decorated borders. All sixty-seven leaves, with ten facing pages of plain text, are reproduced in color and gold with a preface and commentary by D. H. Turner. All the illuminations appear together; the descriptive material is left to the second part of the book. Nothing distracts from the plates themselves so that turning the pages gives a sense of seeing the sequence unfold. Of course, only one-eighth of the original book is here, but the most splendid leaves shine in gold, embellished with buds, butterflies, and birds. These objects seem less to rest on the page than to rise from it, casting shadows in the strong light that breaks from the top left of each border. The borders themselves have frames which also cast shadows so that the text floats like an airy panel. The illusion is just the opposite with pages of bordered miniatures where the scenes appear in depth and seem to recede into infinity. Turner believes that the paintings are the work of one artist and his assistants, while the borders were done by other painters. Nonetheless, a wonderful harmony of color and form emerges from the diversity, so that the succeeding pages offer constant surprises. One moves, for example, from a flower-bordered scene of the Adoration of the Magi to a tapestry-framed picture of the Presentation in the Temple with, on the facing page, a panel of text suspended before a scene in which a royal barge is being rowed down a river near a tower. The red and blue banners on the right reflect the colors of the clothes worn in the Gospel tableau on the left, yet the two scenes are literally worlds apart with illusion reversed in both pages. In his comments, Turner is more interested in history than in art criticism and adopts a detached scepticism toward the "excessive importance" people once attached to the saints. He often substitutes hymns for commentary, quoting verses at length with only small justification, while his chatty observations on Christianity often belabor the obvious. Since the Hastings Hours has been almost ignored previously as he observes, his space might have been better served by more analysis of the iconography. But the book is stunning visually and always interesting.

Since 1968, Braziller has published a succession of excellent editions of partial facsimiles, the latest of which is a series of remarkable illustrations that were prepared for a Czech translation of the *Travels* of Sir John Mandeville in the early 1400s.[5] Like his name,

[5] THE TRAVELS OF SIR JOHN MANDEVILLE, introduction and commentaries by *Josef Krasa*. George Braziller, Inc. $45.00.

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Mandeville's stories were fictitious; in fact, he borrowed most of his material from older authors. Yet his account won instant popularity, and translations from the original Latin appeared throughout Europe. In the author's favor were his literary power, narrative skill, range of knowledge, curiosity, and tolerance. The manuscript, which like the Hastings Hours is in the British Library, consists of twenty-eight full-page framed pictures on fourteen sheets of parchment; it is without any text or titles and illustrates only the first tenth of the Czech version. Since his identity has not been established, the artist is known as the Master of the Mandeville *Travels*. He painted the surface of each leaf a light green before drawing his lively figures and scenes in black ink, and he applied colors sparingly in the foreground while painting the background sky in varied shades of blue, sometimes spangling it with stars or decorating it like a tapestry with tendrils and flowers. He touched faces and hands with subtle skin-tones and only colored clothing with an occasional fleck of gold. His trees and meadows are green, but appear rarely; most scenes are dominated by firm architectural shapes, Gothic interiors, and cityscapes. These are seen in strange and ever-changing perspective so that the travelers seem to move in and out of space. Despite the limits of his medium and format, the artist demonstrates a rare genius for drawing dramatic figures in a diversity of settings. They interreact, walk, stop and converse; they are speaking pictures in a travelogue. Mandeville is shown journeying to Constantinople, Cyprus and Syria, and the scenes shift like a kaleidoscope around him. The longest sequence of pictures, however, illustrates the legend of the true cross and Passion cycle in eleven drawings, forming the core of the codex although they involve only a digression in the *Travels*. In one scene, four types of wood for the cross are suggested by four colored grains, and in another a dark blue sky arches over the Garden of Gethsemane, the contrast of monochrome and color creating a sense of timeless monumentality. Josef Krasa's introduction and commentaries combine historical information with art interpretation and are most helpful. Peter Kussi's translation is smooth enough, but I find Ficinus for Ficino surprising, Chrysostomos for Chrysostom unnecessary, and the Apostle Jacob for the Apostle James downright absurd.

With these five books in hand, one has the beginning of a library that will open books within books. Like the mysterious Mandeville, one sets out through them on an imaginative journey to memorable sites and beautiful people, discoveries of lost hidden gold, and a world that is as illusory as it is real. It is a trip well worth the expense of taking.

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DEAN FLOWER

Fiction Chronicle

ANTHONY POWELL'S LOW-KEYED HUMOR has never generated much excitement on this side of the Atlantic, where he tends to be viewed a little solemnly and dutifully as a chronicler of English society. The irrepressible Peter De Vries, a nice exception to this, has been cackling at Powellian wit and recommending it for decades, and now it seems almost as if Powell has responded with his most light-hearted novel since *What's Become of Waring* (1963).[1] It should be noted in passing that this recent novel rounds off the oeuvre with arithmetical nicety: balancing the dozen novels of *A Dance to the Music of Time* are six "other" books (a biography, a book of plays, and the recently-complete memoirs in four volumes) and now six "other"novels.

The story concerns one G. F. H. Shadbold, a meagerly-talented writer who over the years has erected a plausible reputation out of a satiric play, a slim volume of verse, two unambitious novels, and a miscellaney of reviews, BBC activities, and editing jobs. Rewarded well beyond his deserts, Shadbold spends most of his time shoring up the public image of his literary status. The choice titles of his published journals give a good whiff on the manner: *Beyond Narcissus* and *Reticences of Thersites*. Shadbold's nemesis is an even less talented acquaintance, Cedric Winterwade, who is in fact dead but whose interesting diaries pose a severe threat to Shadbold's ego. It seems that the unattainable beauty once beloved by the youthful Shad, Isolde Upjohn, was more or less successfully romanced by the loathsome Winterwade, whose diary reports four orgasms at the very hotel in Paris once recommended to him by poor Shadbold who had no inkling of their affair. Powell mixes the exquisite agony of this posthumous ignominy with Shadbold's increasingly desperate attempts to prevent publication of the diaries.

One can only admire the ease with which Powell slides in and out of Shadbold's miseries. At any given moment he is both magisterially in the character's mind and detached: "By now, broadly speaking, Shadbold's attitude towards the war was that even if it had unquestionably taken place (which he never went so far as to deny) the whole episode had been grossly exaggerated by those with a vested interest in making capital out of wartime experiences." That *broadly speaking* is just right. Powell always has perfect aplomb when he

[1] O, HOW THE WHEEL BECOMES IT!, by *Anthony Powell*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston. $13.95.

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pulls the trigger, as he does in recounting this moment from Shadbold's funeral: "as usual—especially in the case of writers and by no means excluding homosexual writers—several female friends were deporting themselves as Shadbold's widow; a kind of self-imposed moral suttee that is in its way a handsome tribute." Even when the material is screamingly funny, Powell disallows outright laughter. His even tones are full of polite modulation: "in its way," "no doubt," "more or less," "by no means," "may have been," "not altogether," all uttered as if he had got the story from somebody else.

This novel's version of English life has many, somewhat formulaic delights. Shadbold has a wife named Prudence who writes mystery novels under the name Proserpine Gunning. Their cats are named Gentleman Brown and Lord Jim. Their friends at the university, Horace and Janice Grigson, are dangerous bores—he fatally attracted to dull books and she to the French horn. A local pub-owner, Major Jock Crowter, is a shameless sycophant with a keen eye for coin. A young editor sports a Lord Kitchener moustache and sentimentalizes over the mythical Nineties and Twenties. The host of a television talk-show, Rod Cubbage, is a callow opportunist: "Omdurman Terrace?" he says, "Now that's a name evocative of old imperialist days. Would you like to say something of the sunset of imperialism, Shad?" None of this has the bite of real satire, however. The territory is fun to be in—the perfection of Powell's voice alone is worth the price of the ticket—but we have all been there before.

This seemingly endless vein of British satiric comedy in which Powell and others have worked so long has more recently produced an antitype: comedies that prefer to gnash their teeth at the class system and jeer at the vanished glories of empire. Martin Amis, Beryl Bainbridge, and Robert Barnard have all worked this vein. But nobody has done it better recently than Howard Jacobson, whose wickedly funny first novel, an academic satire, makes *Lucky Jim* (one of its progenitors, clearly) seem tame.[2] Jacobson's new version of the angry young man from the provinces banging on the closed doors of academe and privilege is named Sefton Goldberg. He is insistently, humiliatingly, writhingly, self-tormentingly Jewish. How can he possibly teach English literature? He "was Jewish and . . . had therefore never taken a country walk in his life." The details of Nature, he decides, "were not and they never would be Jewish." Football too, a violent game, is equally "not Jewish," owing its origins "to a working class culture that was shaped when the Jews were elsewhere." Sefton is a Kafkaesque genius at making everything feed his luxuriant visions of inferiority. A homosexual has more academic clout than he does; a Chinaman gets more satisfying sex; even his former students (including an orphan wittily named Helen Burns) go on to better academic careers.

[2] COMING FROM BEHIND, by *Howard Jacobson*. St. Martin's Press. $12.95.

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Sefton flails desperately to get out of his academic trap, the Polytechnic, Wrottlesley, where his brilliance and his contempt are equally lost on bovine students who still manage to graduate despite the malevolent misinformation of his lectures. Sefton is no longer a youngster, having previously taught at the Coryapundy Swamp Institute of Technology and at the University of Woolloomoolloo, New South Wales. With credentials like these, he's even farther behind. He applies for every possible job, only to find when he is at last interviewed that his rivals "succeeded in giving the impression that they had been out all day in the forest, reading books." Nowhere is Sefton's paranoiac ingenuity more skillful than when he meets Sir Evelyn, the Master of Holy Christ Hall, whom he must impress. Blue-eyed and youthfully immaculate, Sir Evelyn is not the "small gnarled cleric" Sefton had hoped for:

> Already routed on every front, with Sir Evelyn's hand holding him lightly as if he were a none too dangerous felon or a soiled dishcloth, Sefton considered it unnecessarily bludgeoning of his host to have the advantage over him of both youth and age. Either one would have been ample. He overdid it in the matter of size, also; being at once much taller than Sefton, but somehow appearing to take up less space. He was more formal and more casual as well; and more cheerful and more grave.

Jacobson offers a much more original gallery of satirized types than Powell, perhaps because in part he's truly an outsider. He knows these academic maniacs are humorless bullies, not just harmless or charming freaks. Charles Wenlock, Sefton's chairman and an expert defeatist, pulls down contumely upon them all by calling the Department of Twentieth Century Studies by its old name, the English Department. Arthur Twinbarrow specializes in modern poets whose first or last names are Thomas. Walter Sickert Fledwhite, whose name is symptomatic, wears slogan-buttons of every description, "supporting the rights of women as fervently as he opposed the rights of Nazis." Unlike lucky Jim Dixon—who in the end gets the girl, finds a better job, and all in all wins out over the pretentious idiots of the academic scene—Sefton remains mired in Wrottlesley and can only assault his oppressors verbally. On the school: "Mindful of its obligations to a technological society and anxious not to be confused with Oxford or Cambridge, the Polytechnic aspired to that ideal system of relations which obtained in the best engineering factories and machine shops." On academic subjects: "Although he couldn't remember why he had once liked his own subject he hadn't in the least forgotten what he hated about other peoples'." On literary talk: one man "employed the words 'we' and 'our' exquisitely, implying an acquaintance with levels of ordinariness that no mere ordinary person—no *ordinary* ordinary person—

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could ever hope to rival." Even while Sefton's gaseous *saeva indignatio* issues (as the novel's title suggests) from behind, Jacobson remains poised, unfailingly intelligent, witty, and even in his way elegant.

Hypocrisies of the British upper crust fascinate Francis King quite as much as they do Powell and Jacobson, but he takes a far grimmer view.[3] Never widely-read in this country, King has written eighteen novels and five collections of short stories since 1947 when *To the Dark Tower* appeared. His latest novel is one of his darkest and best, and it may owe something to E. M. Forster's *Passage to India* (King has written a biography of Forster) in its trenchant analysis of a wealthy British family living in colonial India in the late 1930s, at a seemingly safe distance from its civil strife. With war brewing in Europe, one character comments, "How depressing and worrying what we read from home! Though we have all this civil unrest, with that wretched Gandhi constantly stirring up trouble, we seem mercifully far from threats of war." King is less interested in the political ignorance of such an attitude than he is in its moral delusion, its spiritual darkness. His plot is based on an actual crime comitted in Victorian England, but in a bold and effective stroke King transposes it to the foothills of the Himalayas. I will spoil only a little of the suspense by explaining that a young boy is murdered, and India—"What a bloody country!"—is at first blamed: a *ghurka* has recently stabbed and killed an uncle; the father's food may have been poisoned; the *ayah* cannot be trusted; the gardener and his gnomic companion have committed filthy acts; *dacoits* may have abducted the child. Yet the crime seems to remain within the family, as the reader senses from the brilliant opening section of the novel ("Omens"), where King introduces all the main actors from their points of view: the boy Peter, learning about death and shame; his older sister Helen, just returned from English boarding school and realizing her selfish father does not love her; the bored Eurasian governess Clare, learning to revile the lust of her employer; the father Toby, goaded by threats to his authority; the step-mother Isabel, blocking out furtives and shameful memories. It's your typical post-Victorian respectable family, seething with fear, guilt, envy and frustration.

The action is admirably swift, and the deep design does not fully emerge until the very last page. Part of the hypnotic effect comes from King's seeming disinterest: he shows us only what the characters see and think. Running through it all is some obsessive and perverse imagery, as if to suggest a shared familial sickness. Isabel remembers furtive masturbatory acts as a child in the bathroom with her twin brother; Helen and Peter are, on separate occasions, unusually curious about the stinking old privy used by the Indian

[3] ACT OF DARKNESS, by *Francis King*. Little Brown. $14.95.

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servants; Toby, for all his bold lust, worries compulsively about the stains and smells of his lovemaking and even feels guilty about wet marks he leaves on the floor after a bath. The crime too rubs our noses in ordure, slime, ammoniac stench, caked mud and blood, and sexual guilt. Even Mr. Singh, the otherwise rational police official, comes to share in this cloacal vision. He's a fastidious man who recoils from the mess of the English family, and once he imagines seeing a white sari which turns out to be "a sheet of newspaper, probably used at some time by someone who had been obliged to come here, off the road, to defecate." At this point I begin to rebel: is this truly Singh's vision or the author's palpable design? Has the Indian official been so conditioned by these English pruderies, or so tainted by the family crime he's investigating, that he now sees fecal taint everywhere?

The novel weakens considerably when it leaves the humid domestic and racial tensions of India, with all its glimpses of futile religious missions, shadowy servants, sudden thunderstorms, obsequious officials, exotic spiders and worms and poisonous snakes, omnipresent heat and dust. Family disintegrations carry us back to London and finally as far afield as Australia; but in the effective concluding section the author returns us to a reconstruction of the original setting in India, and it's as if we had never left. King has sometimes been faulted for too-slick manipulations, but I thought this novel a *tour de force* of almost continuous intensity. His theme, ultimately, is original sin, and he ends with no assurances about forgiveness or atonement—only a vision of the deep inscrutability of human evil. We know who did it, but not what. I have one reservation: would not writers like V. S. Naipaul or Ved Mehta or Salman Rushdie find King's account of evil just a little too well locked away from social and political realities? As if India never really mattered in this story at all?

Kamala Markandaya, a much gentler and ultimately more mystifying writer than King, offers another story of the British presence in India.[4] In a style by turns cryptic and simple, slow-moving and abrupt, Markandaya's tenth novel tells the story of a friendship between an Indian youth named Rikki and a middle-aged peripatetic British businessman named Toby Tully. Rikki is a fisherman's son, orphaned, an instinctive swimmer, at one with the sea from infancy; but he takes to books—to Bible stories and the English language—almost as readily, under the guidance of a Christian missionary couple, the Bridies. Soon Tully takes their place in Rikki's life, and becomes his access to the interesting Western world. Tully represents AIDCORPS, an anonymous "multinational consortium" which is building an elaborate resort-hotel complex of the sort found in Cancun or Maui nowadays, this one an hour or so from Culcutta

[4] SHALIMAR, by *Kamala Markandaya*. Harper and Row. $15.95.

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and to be called Shalimar. Tully arrives to see that everything runs smoothly. Descendent of merchants and consuls who once ruled India, Tully takes up residence in an old mansion named Avalon, a "dream castle" built by one of his imperious ancestors. So history repeats itself; Tully restores the old place even while the new complex goes up—a hotel "out of the Hilton mold," stainless steel kitchens, cabañas and pool, and many new jobs for the simple folk of a fishing village. Instead of a story about how ugly imperialist empire-builders destroy a beautiful native way of life, or for that matter how the mysterious East defeats the know-it-all Western way of life, Markandaya's story eludes politics and categories.

Tully is a quiet man, subtle enough to be both thrilled and puzzled by Rikki's friendship, and thoughtful about their ways of communication. Rikki veers from generous impulsive gestures to injured pride, and from odd spasms of shyness to unself-conscious candor. He also learns to mix drinks, ride a surfboard, and teach old ladies how to swim. That he is drawn away from his step-family by becoming a lifeguard and a waiter at Shalimar is not after all the problem: social change affects them all, and Rikki seems better equipped to deal with it than most. Oddly, there is almost no suspense at all, and perhaps only one climax. Instead Markandaya prefers many small episodes of amusing and revealing anti-climax. One evening, for example, Tully and his circle of British colleagues and tourist acquaintances happen to discuss the events that *A Passage to India* was based upon: purportedly, a rape.

> "This girl didn't dream." Mrs Tremlett was trembling, as old passions were kindled. She didn't care for such language either. "The poor thing was shamefully—" she shied away from the raw word, and substituted another, "shamefully violated, the whole station knew that. There was no excuse for suggesting anything else whatever."

Markandaya is very amused and distant from this: how will her characters react? One man yawns and says, "Whatsisname put it in a book, didn't he?" "It was never proven," says another. "No end of repercussions," murmurs someone else. So the talk drifts away, despite Mrs Tremlett's kindled passions. The point has been quietly yet firmly made: the old prejudices linger, but in fact the Anglo-India they came from is gone.

A few pages later they all troop off to see the Malabar Caves which turn out to be not indescribable, as in Forster's novel, but full of wall sculpture depicting gods and goddesses, some of them "joined in love-making," as Rikki innocently explains. Wonderfully, because Markandaya treats it almost as an afterthought, the visitors bring home not horrors and prejudice but a baby, a foundling. And the very nice but aimless Mrs. Pearl, too old to learn to swim, be-

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comes its mother. With infinite patience and tact the novel shows how the Anglo-Indian world has reversed itself. Avalon has not after all been restored for Tully or his likes, nor finally will Shalimar belong to its makers. The landscape itself exerts its own insistent authority, its seductive lure and threat. A Hindu-Brahmin by birth, Markandaya knows the ways of time and fate. "Subtle country, my boy," says Tully at the end. "The minx knows . . what she's given, and how to give back, in exact proportion." We leave this rueful British observer with his final reflection on India's adroitness: "He could not for his life have sorted the aloes from the honey." Nothing is italicized in this novel, and it is very hard to take anything out of the subtly-meandering narrative stream without its losing color and value. Markandaya is a crafty and wonderful writer, unlike anyone else.

Mary Robison's short stories about American families seem by comparison shockingly narrow, turned in upon themselves.[5] They are meant to be, of course: mere glimpses of domestic life, such as anxious parents talking at the kitchen table while a psychotherapist upstairs persuades their daughter to please eat something. Or an anxious football coach having trouble paying attention to his wife and teenage daughter. Or brother and sister twins, old enough to enter medical school, having problems growing up. Or a young man trying to talk to his alcoholic aunt before his father's impending marriage. These are all conceived as "ordinary people," in the Donald Sutherland-Mary Tyler Moore sense. They enact what Herbert Gold meant by the phrase, "the age of happy problems." Robison, like so many other talented Americans writing short stories these days, does close-ups of white upper-middle-class relatively-affluent well-educated urban and suburban families, with special emphasis on the pangs of growing up. After the likes of Cheever, Updike, Beattie, Paley, Mason, Leffland, Carver, Alice Adams, and so many others working the same vein, cultivating these domestic gardens, one would like to start passing out airplane tickets to the rest of the world.

Robison nevertheless has a fine ear for the odd opacities and queer metaphors of our casual talk. Here is a man called Coach when he is surprised to discover his daughter at home: "You're not home. Aren't you with whoosis? You're supposed to be out. You are *beet* red." As she stomps off to her room, Coach tells her about his new job: "I'll even be on TV. I'll have my own show on Sundays. And I'll get written up in the press all the time. By *real* reporters. Hey! Why am I yelling at wood here?" Another character yanks out the plug of a vacuum cleaner, saying "Come on, you." When a young man telephones home and a stranger answers, he says, "Is

[5] AN AMATEUR'S GUIDE TO THE NIGHT, by *Mary Robison*. Alfred A. Knopf. $11.95.

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this my house?" A young woman changes the subject abruptly with, "Look what the moonlight's doing to the grape trellis." Robison's stories all proceed by means of these odd, off-the-wall glimpses. If the author steps in to comment at all, she does so in the same spirit: "For Jackie, a newspaper has always meant more physical exercise than actual reading" and we see him "rush through a section, his arms closing and opening, and paper beating like wings." These observant touches are funny, but in the end we are left entirely to our own conclusions. My own is that if these stories are indeed meant to be some kind of guide to the night, Robison has not made it dark enough for us to need one.

The awareness of social class typically taken for granted by American writers is never forgotten in Italo Calvino's most recently translated book, a collection of stories first published in 1963.[6] Readers familiar with the fabulous ingenuities of *Invisible Cities* and *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*, which are less novels than meditations on the mysteries of fictive structures, may be surprised at the charming simplicity of these tales. Calvino explains in a note that the first of them were composed in the early 1950s "in a very poor Italy, the Italy of neo-realistic movies," while the later stories occur when "illusions of an economic boom flourished." For the hero, Marcovaldo, illusions flourish in every story. Hard pressed by poverty, demanding wife and children, peremptory employers, a dreary industrial city, his own aging body, Marcovaldo schemes endlessly to outwit his fate. In the hot summer he longs for bucolic shade and quiet, and attempts "a park bench vacation." Advised to take "sand treatments" for his rheumatism, he finds the only clean sand is on an industrial barge, which comes unmoored. Ordered to take care of a potted plant at work, he cares for it too well. His schemes to trap game birds on the tenement roof, to fatten up a stolen rabbit for Christmas, to use wasps to cure arthritis, all go relentlessly awry. If you've seen "Big Deal on Madonna Street" or any Vittorio Gassmann comedy, you will know Marcovaldo at once: touchingly earnest, full of romantic notions, a big talker yet a gentle man, certain to fail.

Calvino deepens the comedy by constant reminders of social reality. If Marcovaldo trades lunches with a boy of wealthy family, someone instantly steps in to call him a thief. Lured into a supermarket but without any money, playing Santa Claus for the spoiled children of the rich, or trying to dispose of too many free samples of detergent, Marcovaldo is only driven back where he came from. Affluence is a soap bubble in the sky, glimpsed for a moment, then leaving "only smoke, smoke, smoke." Emphasizing this naturalistic trap, as the book's sub-title indicates, are the seasons: the twenty

[6] MARCOVALDO, or the Seasons in the City, by *Italo Calvino*. Trans. by *William Weaver*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $9.95.

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stories carry us through the yearly cycle five times, without the slightest suggestion that anything will change. After a miserable day of shoveling snow, Marcovaldo produces a mighty sneeze, as if in protest for all he has to weather in life:

> When Marcovaldo reopened his eyes, after being stunned [by his own sneeze], the courtyard was completely cleared, with not even one flake of snow. And to his gaze there appeared the familiar courtyard, the gray walls, the boxes from the warehouse, the things of every day, sharp and hostile.

William Weaver's crisp translation catches these flights and drops perfectly.

For there *are* flights in almost all of these stories, fantastic swerves up, up and away from reality, as readers of Calvino's better known works will have guessed. Marcovaldo is literally aloft at the end of one story when in a thick fog the bus he boards turns out to be an airplane bound for Singapore. This is not just another joke at Marcovaldo's expense. Calvino ends the tale with a mysteriously resonant uplift: "The night beyond the windows was full of stars, now that the plane had passed through the thick blanket of fog, and was flying in the limpid sky of the great altitudes." For all his Chaplinesque foolishness, Marcovaldo seems to know about such things: *the* great altitudes. In another story he finds himself the only inhabitant left in the city during a mid-August holiday, and he begins to explore it as a wholly new world: a building he sees every day becomes "in its reality" a quarry of gray sandstone; an old wooden fence has fresh pine boards. He discovers a whole realm of "bark and scales and clots and nerve-systems." Even after being violently pulled back through the looking-glass, interviewed by a TV crew, and put to work on the floodlights while a famous film star dives into the city fountain for the cameras, Marcovaldo is "blinded and dazed" by overlapping versions of reality. He concludes that his dream city probably wasn't real, but Calvino and the reader know better. For anyone curious about the foundations of Calvino's many fictions of invisible cities, these stories should be required reading. They *are* a guide to the night.

Normally my impulse is to stay away from historical novels, since they tend to be neither historical nor novel but rather costume romances loaded with anachronisms. But Ann Schlee's beautifully-executed second novel persuaded me otherwise.[7] It opens with a brief statement about sources: "The documentation of Augustus Walmer is slight," an anonymous voice informs us. We hear about certain journals and letters written by Walmer, run through the bare facts of his family background ("Death swept through his family like an

[7] THE PROPRIETOR, by *Ann Schlee*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston. $15.95.

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epidemic, taking forms particular to that time"), and conclude with this:

> His motives for going [in 1836] to so remote a spot are obscure, but it would seem he intended to devote his life to the conducting of an experiment to restore the island's economy along utilitarian principles and to promote the greatest happiness among the greatest number of his people.

This all sounds quite convincing: there must have been an Augustus Walmer; perhaps footnotes and a bibliography will follow. The first sentences of the novel proper are equally "historical": "Time cannot have affected the sensations of seasickness. Then as now that complaint . . ." and the story is underway. Schlee reminds the reader at regular intervals that the events are history: "Now the garden is overgrown," she will say, preparing to describe how it was then; or she will adopt the editorial manner again: "None of this is apparent in the tone of his letters . . ." Simple narrative is interspersed with entries from journals, excerpts from business transactions, and lengthy personal letters. The strategy is to create an illusion that all the intervening material is not made up but rather constitutes reasonable conjecture about places, persons, and documents that all have verifiable authenticity.

The strategy frequently works well, partly because the setting—a small group of islands in the English channel—seems so timeless. In a fine scene toward the end Schlee describes two characters walking between two islands during a neap tide when the ribbed and whorled sand can practically be felt by your feet as you read. Wind-whipped trees and lichen-covered boulders, the boil of surf around rocky outcrops—these images, when carefully evoked, almost cannot be anachronistic. The social history presents more difficulties. Walmer, the grim proprietor of the islands, becomes more stereotyped as the plot unfolds. He divides his time, like Brontë's Rochester, between opulent social events in London and his retreat on the islands, occasionally inviting elegant ladies and gentlemen to visit. He suffers a strangulated Victorian passion for the wife of a good friend, and gets with child a commoner of the islands. An intelligent orphan girl is sent by Walmer to London to a training school for teachers, an experience not quite as bad as Jane Eyre's at Lowood but almost. A young man falls in love with her, but he must marry and remain in his social class. Awfully familiar material, all of this, but how else can the conflicts of typical English gentry during the 1840s and 1850s be rendered? Schlee makes her task even more difficult by using near-parody names: Mrs. Amelia Pontefract is perhaps the worse, but there is also a Miss Christian, and a woman designed to fit the name Euphemia. Literature, not history, gets in the way here; I can only think of Beerbohm's parody of the Meredith female, Euphemia Clashthought.

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Fortunately these stock materials are saved again and again by the rich immediacy of Schlee's language. In fact she seems incapable of writing a bad or inelegant sentence: "In a sudden rush of feeling, she tightened her arm around Miriam's waist and leant her head so that the straw brims of their bonnets grated and made her shiver." The credibility is sustained by such precise vignettes as these. Another example:

> she kept resolutely on, further and further out on the colourless brilliance of the sands. Bright flotillas of light were caught here and there in the emptying hollows. His eyes were dazzled by it. Her small form seemed corroded by light.

At such moments the past seems saved from mere literary convention. But the moral of it all will not strike many readers as fresh: that the peculiar forms of suffering in the high Victorian world were the result of proprietors like Augustus Walmer who meant to create and own the most virtuous society possible.

Philip McFarland's second novel actually does what Ann Schlee's pretends to do.[8] It is based on a dreadful episode in New York in 1741, the Great Slave Conspiracy Delusion, in which 34 innocent people were hanged or burned at the stake and 90 others deported, all as the result of rumor and prejudice gone beserk. McFarland is a history teacher, so for those who wish to check him he has provided a note on his sources and on his use of what he calls "composites" or "individuals who might have lived in New York at the time, as derived from various contemporary letters and journals." One of these figures, for example, is made authentic by material drawn from Alexander Hamilton, William Byrd, and James Boswell. McFarland's admirable intention is "to avoid intruding twentieth-century attitudes on eighteenth-century people." But his most original stroke, as far as plausibility is concerned, is to maintain a contemporary historian's voice throughout, one who presents, summarizes, interprets, and occasionally comments on the events. "I own the original now," he will say of the (fictive) *American Journal of the Fifth Earl of Cavendham,* "a brown duodecimo notebook of ninety-six pages . . . filled with a minute shorthand" which was deciphered by "my diligent uncle and various librarians and graduate assistants." Or he will quote lines from *The New-York Weekly Journal* "which the curious may read still, in the lower-left corner of the fourth page of the issue for September 29, 1740." Dramatizing his own role in the foreground has the interesting effect of objectifying the events of the past. The reader never feels pushed falsely into someone's point of view, for the narrator always identifies his source, or indicates a conjecture, or stops to ask unanswerable questions: "One is left to wonder about Wilson," McFarland will write;

[8] SEASONS OF FEAR, by *Philip McFarland.* Schocken Books. $15.95.

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"was the seaman deflecting guilt on himself? Had he been trying to entrap the slave?" And so on. The sense of being in the presence of a patient historian and sifting all the evidence is complete.

The narrative begins with a young English lord, Charles Corimer, disembarks with a monkey on a chain, two leashed greyhounds, and a recently acquired black slave, a Guinea man called Bonny Jack. Jack promptly runs away, and nothing much happens except a bitterly harsh winter: many fall ill, or starve, or freeze to death. In the spring a series of fires break out and stolen goods are found at the dingy tavern of a man who serves blacks, one Hughson. These unconnected events get connected in the mind of a spiteful bondservant named Mary Burton, who begins to tell stories about Hughson, various slaves, and a plot to burn down the fort and overthrow the colony. More fires and suspicions break out, investigations are launched, and soon a frenzy of suspicion runs out of control. The process is appalling and yet fascinating to read. Flagrant violations of what we might assume to be the obvious principles of justice occur daily. Jailed blacks protesting their innocence are terrified into changing their stories, then put instantly to death; reputable witnesses are ignored in favor of mere gossip and allegation; men are burned at the stake after convictions on hearsay evidence; and the star witness keeps remembering new names to add to her accusations. It almost makes the Salem witch trials seem trivial.

McFarland leaves it to the reader to determine any larger purpose, if there be one, behind this novelistic-historical enterprise. After all, even in the most scrupulously objective look into the past, we gaze with the lenses of the present. I think McFarland has set up his moral this way: the young English lord returns to England with his slave, having rescued Bonny Jack from certain death; and on the last page of the novel fervent New Yorkers of various religious persuasions give thanks to their gods for "saving the people of the province from the late horrid and dangerous conspirators." But only one voice gets to the heart of the matter, and it belongs to an anonymous preacher quoted much earlier in the story. He says

> "that liberty was the natural right of all men equally. He thought that to all rational creatures bondage is uneasy, frequently occasioning sourness and discontent, which must affect not the bondman only but all such as claim mastery over others."

That voice belongs to history of course, not fiction: it is John Woolman's.

If you were born in Cape Town, South Africa, the urgency of these same issues—and the dangers of writing about them—increase dramatically. James Coetzee, who is white and teaches literature at the University of Cape Town, has found ways to write about racial conditions in his homeland which are at once oblique and scathingly

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direct.[9] He never mentions that his hero is black, never accounts for the background of rioting and warfare in the city, almost never voices any accusations. The story concerns only the struggle for existence of one man, objectively told. Michael is born with a hare-lip, thought to be retarded, put to work as a city parks gardener. When his mother falls sick and war ravages their home, Michael—who is usually called simply K—begins a journey in search of some place he can live. His instinct is to head for the place where his mother was born, taste some freedom, plant seeds. Between the barren landscape and the endless tyrannies of society—officialdom, police, army, labor gangs, "relocation" camps, hospitals—K prefers the landscape: "He thought of himself not as something heavy that left tracks behind it, but if anything as a speck upon the surface of an earth too deeply asleep to notice the scratch of ant-feet, the rasp of butterfly teeth, the tumbling of dust." K learns to survive on less and less food, until he becomes something of a hunger-artist. When a worried doctor tries to feed him, K pushes the food away. "It's not my kind of food," is all he will say. Earlier, while starving in the mountains, K remembers being hungry as a child in the state school: "Hunger had turned them into animals who stole from one another's plates and climbed the kitchen enclosure to rifle the garbage cans for bones and peelings. Then he had grown older and stopped wanting. Whatever the nature of the beast that had howled inside him, it was starved into stillness."

Coetzee narrates this grim journey with a severely controlled precision. The subject of most sentences is simply "he"; and yet with their strong sensory details and supple rhythms these sentences are never dull: "He held his hand in the flow [of water] and felt the force beat his fingers back; he climbed into the dam and stood under the stream, turning his face up like a flower, drinking and being bathed; he could not get enough of the water." It is all a grim poetry of survival. Marring this technique, however, are certain heavy reminders that the story is a political parable. An aggrieved voice pushes in that does not seem K's at all:

> What a pity that to live in times like these a man must be ready to live like a beast. A man who wants to live cannot live in a house with lights in the windows. He must live in a hole and hide by day. A man must live so that he leaves no trace of his living. That is what it has come to.

The same voice steps in to preach one of the novel's messages:

> He even knew the reason why: because enough men had gone off to war saying the time for gardening was when the war was over;

[9] LIFE AND TIMES OF MICHAEL K, by *J. M. Coetzee*. Viking. $13.95.

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> whereas there must be men to stay behind and keep gardening alive, or at least the idea of gardening; because once that cord was broken, the earth would grow hard and forget her children. That was why.

It seems false to put this philosophy of Gardening vs. War into the brain of a poor black man whose heroic story has already made that point with mute eloquence. Toward the end of K's life as his body shrivels down to pure spirit, Coetzee shifts the point of view to a white doctor who tries to save K. What's gained is not only an objective look at K ("Can't you tell the difference between a thin man and a skeleton?") but also someone who is drawn into the logic of K's behavior, a near-convert. "If I had taken Michael seriously I would always have been ready [to follow him]," the doctor thinks, after he has missed his chance. But when Coetzee switches back at the end of K's point of view, the credibility is broken. It made me wish the doctor *had* followed K to the bitter end, or that the alternative viewpoint had never been used in the first place.

Perhaps the most telling political statement of the novel has to do with the Visagie farm where K's mother was born, a place where K twice finds asylum. The Visagie family stands clearly for the whole South African social structure of white and black, master and slave. Its members are dispersed now except for a grandson K's age, a fugitive from the army who hides there for a time and tries to make K his servant. But the black man knows where he wants to live: "Because whatever I have returned for [thinks K], it is not to live as the Visagies lived, sleep where they slept, sit on their stoop looking out over their land." But whether the black man can survive without imitating his oppressor, Coetzee seems to be saying, is the next question.

The first thing to understand about Jay Cantor's political novel is that it is not a biography of Che Guevara.[10] Cantor has saturated himself in the extensive literature of his subject—diaries, memoirs, letters, biographies, and histories—but he writes neither a fictionalized history nor romanticized legend. His real subject is to explore the revolutionary forces at work in Third World nations, especially the Latin American ones, and he decides that the way to search out the meanings of these forces is by an imaginative inquiry into a centrally symbolic figure who embodies them. Unlike Coetzee whose questions are concentrated into a political fable, Cantor works on the largest scale: the story ranges through Argentina, Mexico, Guatemala, Cuba, Peru, and Bolivia; the complete cast of characters would require several pages to list; and although the death of Guevara in the mountains of Bolivia in 1967 marks the end of the story in one sense, Cantor enlarges it with three passages titled "Dates."

[10] THE DEATH OF CHE GUEVARA, by *Jay Cantor*. Alfred A. Knopf. $17.95.

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One serves to establish a context of revolution in our century ("1927: The Communist Party of China leads an uprising in Shanghai . . ."); another at mid-novel lists revolutions current in 1966 ("The United States begins the long intensive bombing of Hanoi . . ."); and a final list brings us to the blank space after the last date: 1984. Cantor departs from the method used by other North American writers attempting similar subjects (like Robert Stone in *A Flag for Sunrise* or Margaret Atwood in *Bodily Harm*) by daring to write from within the mentalities of revolutionaries, guerrillas, peasants, mercenaries, and politicians themselves. Or seeming to: the act of sympathetic identification is sustained over a narrative of about 238,000 words, and none of it to my mind seems faked.

I confess that I did not want to read this novel at first: its length was daunting and its apparent subject seemed to me mainly a cult enthusiasm of the sixties. But I was hooked after only a few pages, and I am not the sort who goes around calling my more affluent friends Capitalist Pigs or Imperialist Aggressors. Much of Cantor's success comes from the fact that he knows his subject the way Melville knew cetology. He knows how soldiers curse, how guerrillas attack and escape, how a Bolivian Indian tells stories, how Fidel Castro presides over a meeting, how the streets of La Paz look, how political rhetoric endlessly yammers, what it feels like to have asthma. Every subject seems rendered with authority. No doubt the various documents used, notably Che's Bolivian Diaries, enhance credibility, but Cantor has the skill to blend fact and fiction. I would never have guessed that Che's father was not in fact a doctor, as the novel has it, but among other things a government employee.

Cantor's overriding conception, and the device that more than anything else makes it all work, is to tell the story through recollections. The first half of the novel is narrated, actually written down, by Che in exile on the Isle of Pines, where he was sent by Castro in 1966 for a period of "self-criticism." He broods over all the forces that brought him to this falling out with Castro, beginning with his arrogant isolated youth in Buenos Aires, touching on his medical school training and a longish phase of Gandhi-inspired non-violent activism, tracing his emergence as a skilled leader of guerrillas in the Sierra Maestra of Cuba, and bringing him into ascendancy with Castro in the takeover of Havana in 1959. Appropriately, the novel "happens" not in history but in Che Guevara's self-scrutiny and in the fictions he makes of his life. Hovering nearby on the Isle of Pines is Walter Tulio, a Cuban sidekick and devout admirer of Che, who questions and comments on the memoirs and becomes virtually his other self.

The second half of the narrative carries this self-reflexive story ahead even more fictively. Walter now becomes its rememberer, looking back upon the disastrous Bolivian campaign in which Che's guerrilla forces persuaded not a soul to join the revolution and

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were gradually decimated and killed. Walter is one of the five who escape, and he searches now in fury and sorrow to explain how Che (which means "Pal") was defeated and whether he actually betrayed or advanced the cause. No mere framing device is involved here: this *is* the story, just as Quentin Compson and Shreve figuring out the story of Thomas Sutpen in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom* are the story. It gradually becomes apparent that the useful Walter is probably the author's other self as well as Che's. At times his narrative becomes almost more painful than he can endure, and he improvises alternate endings. One such has Che surviving and living an ignominious domestic existence in Florida, worried about his wife's fidelity. What works best in this panoramic novel? The account of Che's childhood is extraordinary, and the first encounters with political leaders are all memorable, but most vivid of all is the long detailed account of how the Bolivian Indians resisted Che, listening in silence and then making him into a mythic figure, weaving him into their folklore and remaining themselves unchanged. Cantor seems almost to have traveled himself in those arid mountain wastes, with an anthropologist's tape-recorder and notebook, and seen Che disintegrate into a legend.

One reviewer of the novel objected that its style suffered from monotony and the characters tended to sound alike. But I wonder whether it should have been otherwise. Cantor's style is bare and direct because it is meant to represent the Spanish of unsophisticated revolutionaries, and it tends toward sameness for a good reason: that the real narrative is a composite of Che's voice and Walter's, and in a sense does not really belong to the self-effacing author. But it must be Cantor's voice that speaks at the very end in summary of Che: "Let his life interrogate yours; then improvise an answer—the next, the necessary step." No answers will spring to anyone's lips at this point, if the interrogation has done its work. For me it has; I think this is an extraordinary book.

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DON KLEINE

Mann Alive

FOR SIXTY YEARS AND MORE—from Lübeck schooldays to his death in 1955—Thomas Mann kept a diary[1] in which, each night before retiring, he set down the day's events and impressions. Unread even by Katia his wife, this confidential record was for Mann a pleasure amounting to a necessity. A February 11, 1934 entry reads:

> I love this process by which each passing day is captured, not only its impressions, but also, at least by suggestion, its intellectual direction and content as well, less for the purpose of rereading and remembering than for taking stock, reviewing, maintaining awareness, achieving perspective.

Yet the story of Mann's diary is less one of preservation than of wholesale destruction. In 1896 he burned all volumes up to then, and in 1945 everything before 1933 other than the 1918–1921 portions: hardly actions designed to guard "each passing day" against time's flight.

Since Mann's feelings about his diary were feelings about his life, the ambivalence in his disposition of these writings seems natural. True, the thousands of pages consigned to the flames did include references to secret erotic interests; so do the volumes retained. Rescued from conflagration, the 1918–1921 material proved useful for the early Weimar background in the thirty-sixth chapter of *Doctor Faustus*. Why, having been employed, did it not go up in smoke? Once you burn, why stop? But then, why start? One is pleased to imagine that Thomas Mann could not have answered these questions.

Luckily, the spirit of conservation prevailed in Mann's final years. Labelling them "without any literary merit," he nonetheless specified that existing parts of the diary be opened twenty years after his death—then, as he surely knew, to be published. Though more are on the way, four volumes of the *Tagebuch* in its entirety have already appeared in Germany. From these Hermann Kesten has brought together a selection in English. His gathering coincides with the most arduous and fruitful periods of Mann's career: the Munich years immediately after World War I, during which he completed a sizable portion of *The Magic Mountain*; his exile during

[1] THOMAS MANN: DIARIES 1918-1939, selection and foreword by *Hermann Kesten* and trans. by *Richard and Clara Winston*. Harry N. Abrams, Inc. $29.95.

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the thirties in Switzerland and later in America, which saw completion of the *Joseph* books and the start of *Doctor Faustus*. Presumably a second, still uncollected volume in translation will take us from 1939 to 1955.

A sense of impersonality, of classic poise and Olympian detachment, clings to Mann's image as an artist. Seismographs of the modern spirit, its dark regressions and mad romanticisms, his writings measure our century's crisis against persisting humane values. But they do more. They measure our heritage from the Greeks, Middle Ages, and Romantics against our crisis (a crisis at once abominable and unspeakably liberating). In *Death in Venice* the interpolations from the *Phaedrus*—rich with ancient feeling, Plato's elevated cult of boy-love—clash grotesquely with Aschenbach's "contemporary" breakdown. Yet, modernly "sick" though it be, there is tragic beauty in Tadzio-love that affirms in the face of squalid collapse an equivocal contact with old ideals. Mann's ability to squeeze out the residual dynamic of traditional beliefs, to resonate them in concrete (even bizarre) dramatic enactments, attests to the genius of a radical skeptic in humanist guise. What makes him one of our century's supremely interesting novelists is Mann's inability to imagine any situation that is not riddled with thought in its dramatic and ethical extension. He felt ideas in his bones, and for him they were almost sexual in their capacity to incite and obsess, bring joy and disaster.

It would be strange (indeed, highly unsettling) if Mann as a person and the poised, austere ironist of his fiction were one and the same. In *Tonio Kröger* he proclaimed an eternal quarrel between the artist and the burgher. As diarist, Mann is much closer to the latter; his creative work is only one aspect of an existence jammed up in a variety of enterprises. The nature of the diary, and the flavor of his Munich years, are captured in an entry of September 15, 1918:

> Glorious, sunny, blue, warm early-autumn day. Windows and French doors open. At breakfast read the Austro-Hungarian peace note to all belligerents, framed with considerable tact and human feeling.—My work consisted chiefly of revisions. Rested in the garden. Telephone call from Opitz, who is passing through. Correspondence in connection with the Rhineland lecture tour, for which I am asking 1,600 marks. Wrote to Cossmann and Walter. Warmly recommended the *Nietzsche* to Hofmiller. Outdoors, thought again about the hexameters. If only "Bauschan" were finished, but ennui and impatience only slow and paralyze my work.—Carried the little one about a good deal. Before nightfall, sauntered in the park during a golden sunset, with upset stomach from too much honey.

Notice the heterogeneity here: weather, the War, literary work ("Bauschan" became *A Man and his Dog*, the "hexameters" a poem to his daughter, "the little one"), money, lectures, friendship (Wal-

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ter Opitz and Bruno Walter), letters, reading. The giveaway word appears in the last sentence: "sauntered," a man at home with himself.

Far from a "writer's diary," this is the record of somebody who happened to write. Inside talk, craft problems, small specifics of doing the job, won't be found. At times, Mann interprets himself like a seminar leader:

> Both Pastor Bunge and Settembrini are equally right and wrong in their viewpoints. Sending Hans Castorp into the war thus means sending him into the beginning of the struggle for the new after he has thoroughly savored its components, Christianity and Paganism. (April 17, 1919)

But the dominant note is unabashedly personal. Mann alive: fastidious, pedantic, angry, happy, anxious. Germanically bemused by bodily functions, he was martyr to headaches, heartburn, insomnia. Gums give pain, dentures wobble. Foods are named and meals evaluated. Haircuts loom: how you dress makes a difference. It's a diary heavy with domestic satisfaction, husbandly love and misgiving: Katia was odd at dinner. At least one of the children (there were six) is usually ailing. Every few weeks, a handsome young man catches the eye. Can such a fellow have written *The Magic Mountain*? Have written anything?

Of course he could, but this is the burgher's book. And Mann, for all the dense domesticity, was a wholeheartedly public being, the most influential German man of letters since Goethe. History invades, willy-nilly overruns his diary. Ardently partisan (politics is the flesh of ideas), Mann had a habit of invading history. After *Buddenbrooks*, each of his writings were greeted as an event in the evolution of Germany's national identity. Champion of Prussian blood-mysticism during World War I (*Meditations of a Nonpolitical Man*), conscience of Weimar, 1929 Nobel winner, he became in the thirties spokesman of democracy, the Western tradition of decency and reason against Nazi blood-barbarism. Robed in guises of the exemplary, the burgher—whose international monumentality rested on the fact, not the nature, of the artist's accomplishment—bore a moral witness as eloquent in its way as *The Magic Mountain*.

Except for good luck, much of this might not have been. In Switzerland when Hitler came to power, Mann knew it would be dangerous to return. Directing that his diary be sent to him from Munich, he was frantic with apprehension at "this threat to my life's secrets. . . . The consequences could be terrible, even fatal" (April 30, 1933). Delivered to the Gestapo by Mann's chauffeur, finally maneuvered away by his lawyer, it reached him after sickening delays. Had the Nazis retained and used their prize (perhaps as blackmail), it could have gagged Mann's conscience forever.

Outrage and contempt are the keynote of Mann's response to

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Hitler. One cherishes the Lübeck aristocrat's disgust at the Fuehrer's mispronunciations. Several Nazi leaders fancied themselves highly cultivated. Such parody of the "aesthetic style" earns Mann's icy disdain:

> Press conference at "General" Goering's. Dressed with the greatest elegance, in the English style in shades of gray, with pearl studs, he walked up to the table and, toying with a long pencil, began to speak about the theater. After a time he slipped his hand into his pocket, causing his silk-lined jacket to gape open and reveal a golden dagger. His hair is artificially waved.—(February 13, 1934)

The Swiss years record a somber viewpoint in tune with Henry James's comment on World War I, that "to have to take it all now for what the treacherous years were all the while really making for and *meaning* is too tragic for any words." No simple outgrowth of Versailles-shock, the Nazis were a cancer "natural" to the culture which generated them. Harboring the seeds of nightmare, the better older Germany had an integrity and humane richness to which Mann remained loyal. With shy pride, he insists (January 31, 1935) "that many of the honors I received . . . may be understood as simple human respect in the presence of a survivor from a nobler era."

Mann became Germany in exile. The diary gap between 1921 and 1933 seems a metaphor of approaching estrangement: he who sauntered in Munich full of honey wakes up in a Switzerland not quite familiar. The oddity of life abroad after 1933 glosses the queerness of a totalitarian *Heimat* no longer "itself." In their essayistic durations, the Swiss entries seek to control in words the new Germany's leering criminal cakewalk. Queerness multiplies: several visits to America (Mann by now stripped of German citizenship) introduce to the diary a fragmented non-sentencing somehow nerveless, touristically notational. America is space, and if Mann, swirled across the continent—addresses at Madison Square Garden, Ivy League commencements ("Walt Disney and I received the strongest applause": June 23, 1938), meetings with F.D.R., conferences in Hollywood, lectures in Kansas City—cannot shape his impressions it is because our ceremonial traveller never stands still long enough to do that. The diary closes as Mann settles in at Princeton, works on *Doctor Faustus*, and awaits the outbreak of World War II:

> The phenomenon of National Socialism's being undeserving of the artist's skill. Failure or despair or renunciation of the word, the feebleness of denunciation. Have reality and art ever before been so utterly incompatible? Art not applicable to "life." The deadliness of nazism, the paralysis it spreads. (February 14, 1939)

After the war, he settled permanently in Zurich; he never reclaimed his German citizenship.

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HERBERT LOMAS

Defamiliarizing God

GOD MUST BE MUCH MORE INTERESTING than is generally supposed: not only unshockable—having seen it all—but a super-administrator, the best, the almost invisible kind, the most insightful psychiatrist, and the most humorous sex-therapist. Even these images won't do. Yes—he can't be inferior to any human being we've known or ever imagined; he couldn't be without any of the best human characteristics he and we have invented together; but the most difficult thing about him is that he transcends all these knowns and unknowns. Anything we can think about him is only an idol of the mind, a pebble with legs and a navel on the shore: a momentary existence. Not tomorrow, but the next second, he must elude us. He's a dark one. After we think we've glimpsed him, we have to look for him somewhere else, perhaps in the next contradictory experience. Any good theology, any religious poem, book, painting or piece of music should perhaps subtract our knowledge of God—seek the dénouement of unknowableness in *Job*: "Canst thou draw out leviathan with an hook? . . . With clouds he covereth the light. . . . And now men see not the bright light which is in the clouds: but the wind passeth and cleanseth them."

Wayne A. Meeks's method of defamiliarizing religion is to study the first century Christians[1]—those improbable little groups that set up a tiny international network which eventually annexed the Roman Empire and created the modern world—from the outside, as if the action of God were not the most important thing about them. He wishes also to avoid generalities such as "the Jewish doctrine of this or that" and, instead, depict the social life of the ordinary Christian, not just the leaders, in "microscopic" not "thick" description.

It sounds simple. In fact, the evidence is derisory. Even in the texts, the real evidence, only about eighty people are referred to, mostly just names, if that. It comes down to speculations about thirty or so. We know there were both slaves and slave-owners: Philemon was asked by Paul to take back his runaway slave, now converted, as a brother. The texts might suggest a scatter across all classes except the extreme élite and the proletariat. Patrons *may* have encouraged their dependents to join *en masse*—suggesting unequal

[1] THE FIRST URBAN CHRISTIANS, by *Wayne A. Meeks*. Yale University Press. $19.95.

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commitments—but we can't be sure: "Chloe's people" are slaves, or freedmen, or perhaps both. Those with Latin names *may* have belonged to the original stock of Roman colonists—"who tended to get ahead"—but we can't be sure: Lucius was certainly a Jew; and another Lucius, Luke, may have been a slave! Moreover Latin names were common among Jews in Rome itself. Gaius could put up guests (though this was encouraged throughout Christendom, on the Jewish model) and had a house large enough for meetings—"evidently a man of wealth." Erastus had an official title! Unfortunately it could mean he had one of the highest offices in Corinth, or it could mean he was a slave. Aquila was a tentmaker. Phoebe *probably* had independence and some wealth. Barnabas *may have been* a well-to-do man who took up tentmaking for travel expenses. Yet it's all in doubt because historians at that time, such as Tacitus or the author of Acts, didn't have nineteenth century views on the sacredness of all facts: the impression was important. It's difficult not to feel at times that sociology requires more "evidence of things not seen" than theology does.

Moreover the methodological problems are formidable. Meeks points out that sociologists like the Chicago School or Marxists impose their belief-systems on the evidence and thus half create it. Sociological reductionism contains often naive models of both religion and sociology. Marxism is respectable in that its metaphysic is overt and therefore susceptible of criticism. Marxists, like Karl Kautsky in *The Foundations of Christianity*, watch the ancient class struggle. Christian ideology is a superstructure concealing its economic cause and pretending to be autonomous: the miracle-working God is a compensation for political and economic impotence. For Freud, of course, religion is the great obsessional neurosis of mankind. Like God, these rival, though related, faiths can be neither proved nor disproved; their further truth must be investigated on the philosophical plane. It's as if someone were explaining blushing: it defies the law of parsimony to talk about more than a convulsion in the vascular system. If the observers were scientific ants they might dismiss notions like "embarrassment," "psycho-social situation" or "human life" as fanciful metaphysics.

Meeks points out, however, that theological interpretations of texts can be reductionist, and the model of religion ought to be open to criticism, explicit.

After such clarity, we eagerly look for the explicit statement of his own model, theory, philosophy and theology, since even atheism is a theology: these will condition what he perceives and how he interprets his perceptions. It seems an evasion to be given "eclecticism," for that could mean anything. Doesn't eclecticism generally mean positivistic/nineteenth century materialistic/mechanistic/behaviouristic—and anyone who can produce a plausible account along these lines? Difficult to know, because "there is no comprehensive theory of human social behaviour to guide us." Instead there is a dusty

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herd of consensus: "a family of perspectives shared by a growing number of social scientists and historians that encompass the general point of view of this book."

In spite of these difficulties—and largely because he is an elegant writer and an excellent literary exegete of texts—Professor Meeks has presented fascinating images and new perspectives. Were these Christians "slaves, women and little children, wool-workers, cobblers, laundry-workers, the most illiterate and bucolic yokels, tax-collectors and sailors, without even a primary education," as the second-century Celsus, romanticizers and Marxists have imagined them? God had chosen, Paul says, the weak, foolish and despised—but Paul had certainly exercised their heads with tougher theology than modern congregations are flattered with. Paul was highly educated; his tent-making was a convenient alternative to sponging. "A citizen of no mean city," and proud of it, he knew only the wilderness and the sea as alternatives; the yokels and fishermen of Christianity's origins were outside his ken.

Meeks's speculations suggest a mix of all classes, but mostly experiencing "status inconsistency"—well-up on one count, such as wealth, down on another, such as origin. The distinction between freedman and slave, for instance, cut deep—but was confusing. Slaves could be surgeons, could own slaves, have great influence. A freedman could incense aristocrats by winning coveted honours—yet carry the ex-slave stigma.

"Interesting speculations" is the word, I think, for the earlier sociology-based sections of the book, bringing in the exquisite status-differentiations of the sociologists: categories of power, income, family or ethnic position, local community status, ritual purity, accorded status, subjective status, and so on and so on: a large apparatus for so few facts. Moreover Professor Meeks has a way of advising caution and then proceeding incautiously, proposing a tentative possibility and referring to it later as demonstrated. We do need to know the social circumstances, for they condition meaning: adultery in an OT setting of plurality of wives and concubines only means stealing *another* man's wife. But it's difficult to believe the following cosiness, for instance, is not an extrapolation of contemporary episcopalianism rather than an evidential image of Christian cells under Caligula and Nero:

> May we further guess that the sorts of status inconsistency we observed—independent women with moderate wealth, Jews with wealth in a pagan society, freedmen with skill and money but stigmatized by origin, and so on—brought with them not only anxiety but loneliness, in a society in which social position was important and usually rigid? Would, then, the intimacy of the Christian groups become a welcome refuge, the emotion-charged language of family and affection and the image of a caring personal God powerful antidotes, while the master symbol of the crucified sav-

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> iour crystallized a believable picture of the way the world really seemed to work?

Could this really be derived from the revolutionary, threatening and apocalyptic pages of Paul, the conflicts stunningly dramatized in the Letters and Acts? Would these cannily but uneasily secure people have sought greater peace in this haranguer, constantly threatened with assassination, more like something out of *The Brothers Karamazov* than New Haven?

> Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. (RSV)

Extrapolation is tempting. Most people I know are status inconsistent, upwardly or downwardly mobile, with mixed pedigrees, though I'd not attempt a statistical analysis of such nebulous variables. Mostly, it's not leading to "some form of religious expression": they're sceptical non-joiners. "Why would a freeborn woman marry an imperial slave or freedman?" asks Meeks. He replies: "The reason might be that while in some categories (liberty, extraction) she was his better, in others (money, influence, possibly education or profession) he could improve her position." On the other hand, she might find his body irresistible, she might want to annoy her parents, she might be a do-gooder, he might be the only one who would take her, she might be a masochist, a compulsive libertarian, or his essence might have awakened in her the Platonic vision of divine beauty, as Beatrice did for Dante—to suggest only the first things that come off the top of the head.

The texts themselves, especially when read with the zest, intelligence and knowledge of Meeks, do yield new insights under this social bias. Some rich Christians caused offence by getting drunk at the communal meal, while the less distinguished went hungry. Women, playing new and startling roles, possibly leaving their pagan husbands, may have been arousing new anxieties; the advice to preserve the trappings of womanhood may have been intended to reduce tensions. The ambivalence between the symbolic unity and divisive external lives of Christians is still busy in the Church. St Peter, Barnabas and other Jewish Christians at Antioch were persuaded to stop taking meals with uncircumcised gentiles, after first doing so: a cultural split that permanently separated Paul from the other apostles. Paul urged Philemon to receive his runaway slave

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Onesimus back as both "brother" and "the Lord's freedman"—but did not recommend actually freeing Onesimus or other slaves.

The book helps us to look again at St. Paul's fearless reinterpretations of scripture and morality, as he frees the disciples from the law and then herds them back in. We see again the panache, his suffering as he sides with the gentiles against his Jewishness, his energy and emotion, the bouleversements of his visions, his logic and authority. And from this social angle we see that many of the apparent contradictions in him are his efforts to stabilize what must have been extraordinarily difficult congregations.

It's tempting to extrapolate from medieval Assisi to the first century Levant—less of a leap, one would think, than to the contemporary slums of Cincinnati, where Father Murray Bodo is trying to work out the urban American meaning of Franciscanism.[2] The book is a long meditation on the implications of St. Francis for the twentieth century, and implicitly on the meaning of his own vocation as a Franciscan, though it is never autobiographical. Murray Bodo's approach has been to take the legends and situations of St. Francis as emblematical of current dilemmas in the lives of the perplexed, defamilarizing both St. Francis and ourselves. The message is often: embrace the leper—who may be the person inside you. The "crumbling chapels" to be restored are ourselves and our institutions. Poverty is a paradoxical message—it was in St. Francis's day—in a world whose god is growth, where poverty is a real evil for most of the planet. But poverty is a condition of freedom from false gods; it is allegorical of the spiritual condition of the world; and accepted as the kiss of the leper it brings the kingdom here and now. The book is in fact a treatise on prayer, which manages not to repeat what the other ones say, because it comes from the private centre, you feel, where each person is accountable to no one but God. It is also a book about living "messily" with other people, risking ourselves with others. We have to go down into ourselves as St. Francis went into the cave but then come out—otherwise we become a bat "with a little puffy face and bulging eyeballs," "and you fly all alone and jerkily and you scare people and they run away from you."

But St. Francis, recreated in these pages, is a reminder that the saints are hard men. If they create new brothers and sisters and a new father, it may be because their break with their old families has been so radical. Perhaps the Jews who broke with their ancestral law, or the gentiles who embraced this offshoot of Judaism, felt the traumas of St. Francis as he ritually murdered his father in the Bishop's Courtyard, before the population of Assisi: stripping himself naked—intuitively re-enacting the first century baptism ritual—calling "From now on I can walk naked before the Lord, no longer saying 'my father Pietro Bernardone' but 'our father who art in

[2] THE WAY OF ST. FRANCIS, by *Murray Bodo, O.F.M.* Doubleday. $12.95.

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heaven.' " As Murray Bodo says, this was the volcanic son of a volcanic father: Francis went to his grave without making peace with him. Was Pietro the one person he could not forgive—or were there more charitable reasons? After his success as a saint, would Francis have humiliated Pietro further by forgiving him? Murray Bodo hopes the face of God became the face of his father. Post-psychoanalytically it's impossible not to ask whether guilt at father-murder was not behind his great prayer, two years before his death, on Mount La Verna: "O Lord, I beg of you two graces before I die: to experience personally and in all possible fullness the pains of your bitter Passion, and to feel for you the same love that moved you to sacrifice Yourself for us." This overweening prayer was nevertheless answered with the stigmata. Two years followed of illness and blindness. He spent fifty days, then, in a dark hut near the convent of his beloved St. Clare, experiencing the cry "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But after that came the promise of Heaven, "as certain as if you possessed it already." He then wrote the "Canticle of the Sun," celebrating the union of darkness and light, masculine and feminine.

Difficult not to see in the young Francis's eagerness to kill—thrice riding off to battle with neighbouring towns—a transference of that rage against his father. Even the Franciscan virtues, poverty, shame, foolishness are a direct insult to his father's prized wealth, respectability and prudence. Francis's first "charity" was to steal a roll of his father's cloth, to sell it for the church. When, as the richest son in town, he begged stones from his fellow-citizens for rebuilding San Damiano, they knew it as an insult and threw things at him. Francis makes a beggar his father, saying, "Whenever my father curses me, bless me."

After such publicity, there was no going back. He had to create a better family than the one he had left behind—and, quite remarkably, did. Did he ever quite reach that marriage with the world that adult sexuality confers? There is the beautiful legend of St. Francis and St. Clare on the road and calling at a house for bread. Snide remarks are made—and they decide to part. St. Clare walks into a deep wood, unable to continue without some word of consolation. Francis comes and she says, "Father, when shall we two meet again?" Francis says, "When summer returns and the roses are again in bloom." Suddenly all the surrounding juniper-bushes and frosted hedgerows are covered with roses. And Clare walks to the bushes and picks a bunch of roses and gives them to Francis. For these two, humanity and God are an arrangement of mirrors: man seen in God, God in man, man in woman, woman in man—and looking in these mirrors man sees himself.

Murray Bodo fulfils the Yeatsian aim, to think like a wise man and write like a simple one. This is Christianity seen from the inside, from deep inside, by one of the more intelligent and psychologically sophisticated members of the Church.

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Aboard the Poetry Omnibus

IT IS SOBERING, or perhaps just mildly comical, to note that seventeen years ago this spring I was working on my first poetry chronicle (in fact my first anything) for this magazine. Deadlines must have been a month or so later back then, because I remember listening on the office radio to Philadelphia beat the Celtics in the NBA playoffs, while vigorously typing away. There were a lot of slim volumes that quarter, and there are a lot of them in this one as well, more than I can feel comfortable engaging with in such brief compass. An omnibus review should be compared to a hit-and-run operation; still, if you share with me a disinclination to read very many words about any poet before you've read the book in question, the ensuing brief comments and illustrations may whet the appetite, or suggest what the unwary reader may be getting into.

Gary Miranda's second book was published last year in the very good Princeton Series of Contemporary Poets which also published his first book, *Listeners at the Breathing Place* (1978).[1] There is an ample, leisured quality to Miranda's reflective, full stanzas, paced as they are by an attentive, unauthoritarian voice which concludes "Heron" by reaching over from one stanza to the next and concluding the poem:

> Still, I watch for this one whenever I drive by,
>
> the same way I watch for meaning to move slightly
> beneath the cover of everyday events, whose grace,
> too, has an edge of sadness to it—not like swans,
> imposing their cool will on any landscape,
> but like herons, which always let us believe,
> if we want to, that they might be something else—
> a reed, a fleck of shadow changing shape in the wind,
> a thought: the things we love, visible like that.

The first section of four in this book is titled "Visibilities," and among the things observed most closely and satisfyingly are animals—fox and skunk and salmon, plus the occasional heron. Miranda's poems unfold themselves in the belief that, with enough patience and watchfulness, "meaning" will be found to "move slightly/

[1] GRACE PERIOD, by *Gary Miranda*. Princeton University Press. $10.95; $5.95.

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beneath the cover of everyday events." So in the long and often handsomely executed poem which concludes his book ("The World That is Offered") such meaning stirs in the room when a newly-mobile baby enters it:

> when a child begins to walk, the furniture
> grows new edges, hexagons from squares,
> and knives hang from the usually peaceful plants.
> While over in the corner a single object—
> who knows which one?—rehearses its nomenclature
> of "ball" or "train" or "duck," whereas till now
> it has slept in its safe shape of wood or plastic,
> happy and anonymous and whole.

As with Randall Jarrell's work there is a nice balance of sadness and happiness in Gary Miranda's poems, but the voice which speaks them is not at all anonymous, indeed grows upon one with the force of a new friend made, someone whose reflections about the things of this world can be listened to with profit, even admiration.

A recommendation from Richard Wilbur on the back of David Ferry's welcome new book of poems (his earlier one, *On the Way to the Island*, 1961, was a splendid, not well-enough known first book) asserts that "the same austere and poignant voice" speaks throughout the book.[2] This is so, though perhaps not so wholly a virtue as Wilbur suggests: one yearns at times (or I so yearned) for touches of the witty intelligence found in earlier Ferry poems like "Adam's Dream" and "My Parents Enroute"). Still, there is in *Strangers* a thoughtful subordination of its material to the truth of its epigraph (from the diary of Samuel Ward, 1595): "Think thou how that this is not our home in this world, in which we are strangers, one not knowing another's speech and language." There are moments when this severe truth seems momentarily to be evaded, as in the lovely "On a Sunday Morning" which begins

> My child and I
> Are walking around the block.
> No sea heaves near. No anger
> Blooms through the perfect sky . . .

and in which the wheels of a passing car, the page of a newspaper ("It is a leaf/fallen from a terrible tree") do not terrify, are not the "flashing of . . . fate":

> The tree of anger,
> Tears, fearfulness.
> It is nothing to him,
> And nothing to me, this Sunday.

[2] STRANGERS, by *David Ferry*. The University of Chicago Press. $12.95; $5.95.

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Here is the toneless "austere" Ferry at his very best, teasing us into imagining reserves of feeling—all that has been held back for "pressure" (in Frost's phrase)—behind the spare words.

Ferry's work in longer lines and more stanza-like stanzas is most impressive here, as in a poem written in memory of a dead friend whose living presence is remembered from a time when she sat, with others, a group of friends, on the rocks near Gloucester, Massachusetts. Here are the two middle stanzas from "Out at Lanesville":

> The day is hot, the absolute middle of summer.
> Someone has written an obscenity
> In huge letters on the rocks above and behind
> This group of people, and someone else, one of them,
> Maybe, or maybe a neighbor, the owner of one
> Of the cottages up behind and back in the woods,
> Has tried to erase it and only partly done so,
> So that for years it will say hoarsely FUCK
> To the random winds and to the senseless waves.
>
> One of them is sitting with her back turned
> To me and to the others on the rocks. The purple
> Loosestrife and the tigerlilies are like the flags
> Of some celebration; they bloom along the edge
> Of a small stream that makes its way unseen
> Down to the rocks and sand. Her shoulders are round,
> And rather luxuriously heavy, and the whole figure
> Has a youthful and graceful amplitude of being
> Whose beauty will last her her whole life long.

In the hesitations of this verse, its tentative proceedings and qualifyings, and in the quietly superb selection of individual words like "luxuriously" and "amplitude" and (yes indeed) "FUCK", can be found some reasons why Ferry's voice is so gripping, investing its always "ordinary" materials with more than ordinary feeling, as was the case with the Wordsworth he wrote about so well in *The Limits of Mortality*.

The last few poems in *Strangers* are particularly affecting, poems about ancestors, history and his dead parents, all written or spoken in a voice that seems continually overtaken by the inscrutability of trying to contemplate and give words to things—as in "Rereading Old Writing":

> Out of the ground, in New Jersey, my mother's
> Voice, toneless, wailing—beseeching?
> Crying out nothing? A winter vapor . . .

or as in a picture of his father (in "Graveyard") presented so:

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A writing I can't read myself; the picture
Of my father, taken a couple of years
Before he died; he is sitting alone some place
I don't know; maybe one of the meetings
He took to going to, trying to keep
His place in the world; he is smiling a little,
Cigarette smoke drifting away; he looks
Courteous, as always, not easy to know.

This quite individual book repays living with.

A first book by Lorrie Goldensohn is worth noting because of a similar individuality; she doesn't seem categorizable in any "school" or particular style, and sometimes it's not clear what exactly she's doing in a poem.[3] But there are also strong moments of clarity when one feels her expression has been achieved at some cost:

It isn't my mother dazing here at the sink,
and staring beyond the white pitcher
my hands are soaping, it's me,
scaring myself with what it feels like
to be the only one left. All the ones
that cause a cramp in the heart,
as if the blood fell down momentarily,
and then recovered, gone—
you no longer in the bed beside me,
making those small strangling noises
which are for you the deep sounds of release . . .

These poems don't inevitably distinguish themselves one from another, but as one reads along a feeling develops of an odd, tough sensibility which is knowing, yet vulnerable enough to have something happen to it over the course of a poem:

Put it this way, lovey, some people
stab themselves with their own strength:
stubbornly clinging, when all the best
of collective wisdom, not just your parents
but your friends too—calls up the feral
outline of a lover that love for yourself
should let you let go.

This, from "Letter for a Daughter," may give some sense of the offhand, almost breezy, but also determined and nicely argumentative figure of Goldensohn's work. The one serious mistake made in an

[3] THE TETHER, by *Lorrie Goldensohn*. L'Epervier Press. $4.95.

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interesting (and beautifully produced) book, is a poem titled "Habits of Ivory" which begins "I am putting away my love for you, Jane Austen,/love of the defunct girlish." No such girlish feeling should ever be defunct if it means doing that to Jane Austen (so speaks this boyish defender of beloved Jane). But Lorrie Goldensohn is a challenging poet to read.

I did not find myself challenged by Derek Walcott's sequence of fifty-four poems, meant to encompass his ruminations over the course of a year.[4] Each poem goes on for around twenty or so lines of irregular length, and in such a form, unrhymed, you can say just about anything which occurs to you. A typical Walcott opening goes like this:

> I drag, as on a chain behind me, laterite landscapes—
> streams where the sunset has fallen, the fences of villages,
> and buffalo brooding like clouds of indigo, I pull the voices
> of children behind me that die with the first star, the shapes
> entering shops to buy kerosene, and the palms that darken
> with the lines in my mother's hand . . .

or like this:

> I pause to hear a racketing triumph of cicadas
> setting life's pitch, but to live at their pitch
> of joy is unendurable. Turn off
> that sound . . .

At a number of points I felt like turning off Walcott's sound, as with

> Rest, Christ! from tireless war. See, it's midsummer,
> but what roars in the throat of the oaks is martial man,
> the marching hosannas darken the wheat of Russia,
> the coiled ram hides in the rocks of Afghanistan.

Call it Whitmania or elephantiasis, but there's not much modulation. Verbally, the only thing that holds it all together is the ubiquitous word "like": "The floes crack like rifle fire. Then gulls glitter like flakes"; "But now blue spaces open/like gaps in the smoke"; "The jet bores like a silverfish through volumes of cloud"; "Traffic flows in slow coils, like the doors of a baptistry"; "The thumb of an Irish cop/rolls his bullets like beads"; "The moon shines like a lost button"—an so on and on. A lot of Robert Lowell is kicking around in Walcott's unconscious. But surely one Lowell is enough, and *Midsummer* seems to me a mistaken enterprise.

[4] MIDSUMMER, by *Derek Walcott*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $12.50.

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Much more interesting is Robert Pack's attempt in what he calls his "cycle of monologues" to write a book which is more than a bunch of individual poems (one observed a similar motive in Ferry's *Strangers*).[5] Pack's poems, all in blank verse, range from fifty to seventy-five lines (roughly) and are thoroughly domestic, indeed Vermont-New England in their material. The precursor here is of course Frost's *North of Boston*, that "book of people" in which (Frost said) he dropped to a level of diction below Wordsworth's. Pack's lines are looser, more colloquial even than Frost's:

> I can't believe you don't remember whether
> Grandma's eyes were brown like Jill's or gray
> like mine! Dark gray—I'm almost certain, Mom,
> that they were gray, set close against her nose.

As with *North of Boston*, the risk is that monotony will set in over the long course (there are thirty-three poems in this volume). I won't deny that this happened occasionally, but in the main Pack is astonishingly successful in capturing the feel of voices in motion and conflict, imploring, teasing, trying to persuade each other. In "Trying to Reconcile" a husband speaks to his wife (in a *Home Burial*ish manner) and at a key moment rises (as in the Frost poem) to something more than ordinary speech:

> Watching the stars, pity is what I feel
> for all of us, gaping with thoughts of leaving
> our own lives, banished even from ourselves
> like stars receding with their reddened speed.
> Will they come hurtling back, explode, and start
> the whole damned thing again? I'll rant my way
> back to *my* own life—at least that's better than
> accusing you of my own emptiness.

But eight poems earlier there was "Trying to Separate," in which the wife had her turn:

> Not *you*, Howard, it isn't *you* I'm leaving,
> it's Vermont, the starving deer, the spring
> that never comes, the gloomy ice and clay.
> Even when late sun lingers in the birches,
> darkness fills my mind. I need more light,
> more red—not just a pair of cardinals,
> but flocks of them . . .

More than any book of poems encountered recently, *Faces in a Sin-*

[5] FACES IN A SINGLE TREE, by *Robert Pack*. David Godine. $13.95; $7.95.

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gle Tree is notable for its family feeling, its exploration of the strains and also the humor, the easefulnesses, of domestic life. Not an overwritten-about subject for poetry these days, and Mr. Pack's instinct in taking it on was a sound one. There are lots of good animals and plants here as well—bees and whales and ferns and trillium. To paraphrase Pound on Frost, I know more about Vermont life when I read Robert Pack: that means I know more about *life*. And it is useful to contemplate how such feelings can arise out of the placings of ordinary words in unextraordinary appearing lines of blank verse.

The blurb to Alfred Corn's ambitious long poem about his own past[6] is enough to put you off the book, since it advertises the "haunting formal references to Dante" (the third and last section is in terza without the rima) and notes that his onetime wife "Anne" "like Beatrice, assumes the role of a Muse." Eventually, we are to believe, the narrator's (and Anne's) "new awareness" "leads to a re-evaluation of traditional sexual roles." In other words they split up and go their separate ways, and in the actual poem Mr. Corn puts it like this:

> Then having struggled to say the right farewells,
> And not long after seen you snapped up by someone else
> (Your new Victor, whom I judged suitable, as you did
>
> My new Walter) . . .

You now get the point about "traditional sexual roles"? The poem as a whole is similarly informal, hopeful about life, rather tender toward the narrator's past, especially when revolutionary days are recalled, here in Berkeley revisited.

> Even Berkeley
> Seemed chastened, half-deserted the day we spent
> Visiting your former turf and friends still extant.
> Revolution had subsided into health foods
>
> And meditation, a reverent stillness suspended
> Over all, the changed times no longer seeking change.

Or there is the good news, beamed to them on the West Coast by a New York pal named Ed, whose letter

> described a rising activist
> Mood downtown after a police raid on a dance bar
> Named "Stonewall" had, for once effectively,

[6] NOTES FROM A CHILD OF PARADISE, by *Alfred Corn*. Viking/Penguin. $14.95; $8.95.

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Been resisted. (Incident presumably modest
But which led to ground-breaking consequences
Over the next years . . .

To which Anne says, "Good going" and sees that any "narrow channeling of desire was part/And parcel of the 'same patriarchal control/That tries to keep women powerless and fearful'." So they live and learn, Alfred and Anne, until they amicably pack things in. I read this poem with some pleasure, the gossipy interest being predominant, since the "poetry" seemed largely too easy in its behavior, too uncritical of what it was proffering, and the moral attitudes those of a "sixties child who still kept, somehow, his faith in that blissful dawn":

. . . And there was electric news from home:
Columbia had been taken over, shut
Down by the S.D.S. till further notice . . .

But what about
Our friends—teachers, students, who might be caught
Up in the drama?

What about them indeed! Since I didn't tingle with this electric news, the sound of which still makes me feel sick, I wished that Mr. Corn had cast a colder eye on those good old days back in President Kirk's office. Still, *Notes from a Child of Paradise* (and he really means it) is an often infectious work.

The very first book of poems I reviewed in the chronicle seventeen years ago was also James Tate's first book, *The Lost Pilot*, and I remember referring to him as "sporty."[7] It is fair to say that, in the seven volumes he has published since, Mr. Tate has indulged in much sportiness, indeed provoking me on occasion to shake a finger at his surrealistic indulgences. No more, however. If I am not quite a card-carrying Tate fan, I have accepted him for what he is, an amusing rogue with words, an incorrigible jokester and molester of all linguistic straight arrows. If you think "Tall Trees by Still Waters" promises a fetching landscape, try this:

Where the elk stood, stand I, wordly wise.
My maxims crackle like firecrackers
down to a cricket's Waterloo.
The impulse for far-ranging guesswork
attacks, gives dictation like hailstones
the size of hens' eggs. Just kidding.

[7] CONSTANT DEFENDER, by *James Tate*. The Ecco Press. $13.50.

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Those last two words should not be taken straight, and there are lovely titles in the new volume, like "Lousy in Center Field" or "The Mink Cemetery" or (a particularly nice one) "Paint 'Til You Faint." There is also a most affecting tale titled "The Wild Cheese" which tells of how "A head of cheese/raised by wolves/or mushrooms/recently rolled into/the village, it/could neither talk nor/walk upright." So the mayor takes things into his capable hands:

> He took the poor ignorant
> head of cheese home,
> and his wife scrubbed it
> all afternoon before
> cutting it with a knife
> and serving it after dinner.
>
> The guests were delighted
> and exclaimed far into the night,
> "That certainly was a wild cheese!"

Well I guess! The speaker of another poem confesses that "Me, I'm easy to please. I like ping-pong and bobcats,/shatterproof drinking glasses, the smell of kerosene,/the crunch of carrots. I like caterpillars and/whirlpools too." Who doesn't, I replied. "Ah, trickery, you sassy lark, withered black pearl,/unfetter me from these latches, make me/the Director at every meatball's burial." But Tate's latches will not be unfetterd, since he is thoroughly and I guess happily committed to them. "It's carnival again in the world," one poem announces, and since it's always carnival in James Tate's poems we may, without intending to be dismissive, call it truly a carnival of nonsense.

One of the poems from Charles Simic's colorfully titled collection of previously uncollected work from the last fifteen years,[8] is dedicated to "Jim Tate," and lines like the following might suggest we are located not far from Tate country:

> Those with beautiful silk ties die enviably,
> Head thrown back as if in a nosebleed,
> While a woman unzips their gray trousers
> It's only a few minutes before dawn.
> "Beautiful Imported Silk Ties"

But Mr. Simic is more spare, more laconic, and not as funny as Tate. His poems mainly give off a sour feel, which I guess (consulting Helen Vendler on one of Simic's books) I should find, in her

[8] WEATHER FORECAST FOR UTOPIA & VICINITY, by *Charles Simic*. Station Hill Press, Barrytown, N.Y. $10.95; $4.95.

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words, "arresting" and "the real thing." Couldn't do it though, when I came to a typical poem like "Cold Blue Tinge":

The pink-cheeked Jesus
Thumb-tacked above
The cold gas stove,
And the kid sitting on the pisspot,
Blowing soap-bubbles
For the black kitten.

Very peaceful except
There's a faint moan
From the next room.
His mother's asking
For her medicine.
There's no reply.
The bubbles make no noise,
And the kitten's sleepy.

All his brothers and sisters
Have been drowned.
He'll have a long life, though
Catching mice for the baker,
And the undertaker.

Downer! But since I was told by Wordsworth and Wallace Stevens that poetry was supposed to give pleasure, I don't think I want to hang around very long in Simic's world. Perhaps he will be corrupted by his MacArthur fellowship into more spacious visions and vistas. Or perhaps he's onto a good thing—somebody seems to think so.

The great boring book of the year must surely by *The Collected Poems of H.D.*, which Louis Martz has edited and written an introduction to.[9] Professor Martz thinks it's all quite a serious matter, saying that one of her poems ("The Master") "reveals, with an intimacy and anguish . . . how Freud taught her to accept and understand the ambivalent response of her nature as a part of God's creation." If you can swallow that without gagging, you will have no trouble "relating to" lines like the following from that poem:

I did not know how to differentiate
between volcanic desire,
anemones like embers
and purple fire
of violets

[9] H.D.: COLLECTED POEMS 1912–1944. New Directions. $35.00.

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like red heat,
and the cold
silver
of her feet:

I had two loves separate;
God who loves all mountains,
alone knew why
and understood . . .

There is much more (approximately 600 pages) of this sort of thing: Artemis and Zeus and Sappho and hyacinth and Crete and many portentous questionings and breakings off. The gush that is Greece is richly represented here, and for the round sum of thirty-five dollars. Don't say you weren't warned.

I picked up Richard Hugo's collected poems with some curiosity, since I had stopped reading him after *What Thou Lovest Well Remains American* (1975).[10] It wasn't that I hadn't, on occasion, derived real pleasure from Hugo's poems: "Kapowsin" from *A Run of Jacks* (1961); "In Stafford Country" and "Death of the Kapowsin Tavern," the title poem from a 1965 volume; "Galleria Umberto I" from *Good Luck in Cracked Italian* (1969); "Montana" and "Missoula Softball Tournament" from *The Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir* (1973). Yet in the main any one of his poems seemed pretty indistinguishable from any other one, and I made a prediction that rather than getting better as a poet he would just write a lot more poems. Now, after his sudden death in 1982, Norton has put together an attractive book containing all the poems which appeared in book form during his lifetime (with minor exceptions) plus some new, uncollected ones, and although I don't think my prediction was disproved, I found myself reading the later poems with curiosity and some sadness.

Like his predecessor Theodore Roethke, Richard Hugo was the American poet with all stops out, no qualifications. *31 Letters and 13 Dreams*, a late volume, is full of letters to other American poets and full of the trade's gossip. So he writes to John Logan after they have both gone on the wagon ("as drunks we're done") imagining what might have happened if he, Hugo, had continued to drink:

POET FOUND IN THAW SNOWS CLAIM MISSOULA BARD
I'm in Milltown. You remember that bar, that beautiful bar
run by Harold Herndon where I pissed five years away
but pleasantly. And now I can't go in for fear
I'd fall sobbing to the floor, God, the ghosts in there

[10] MAKING CERTAIN IT GOES ON: The Collected Poems of Richard Hugo. W.W. Norton Co. $25.00.

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> The poems. Those honest people from the woods and mill.
> What a relief that was from school, from that smelly
> student-teacher crap and those dreary committees
> where people actually say "considering the lateness
> of the hour."

Sentimental, maybe, but my heart warmed to it. And there is a late poem, "Second Chances," in which the ghost of his old self knocks at the door, tempting him:

> I can't let it go, the picture I keep of myself
> in ruin, living alone, some wretched town
> where friendship is based on just being around.
> And I drink there a lot, stare at the walls
> until the buzzing of flies becomes the silences I drown in . . .

Moments like these, plus "Last Words to James Wright" (who died before Hugo) make this a book to keep. Although I laughed when a friend of mine said that he was about as interested in Hugo's poetry as he was in the state of Montana, I felt guilty afterwards, never having been to Montana. There is not much form in the collected poems of Richard Hugo, but there is life nonetheless.

"Where land is flat, words are far apart," runs Hugo's line from his early "In Stafford Country." Graywolf Press of Port Townsend, Washington, (scene of two other Hugo poems) has invited us back to Stafford country by publishing his poems from limited editions, 1968-1981.[11] I never think about William Stafford except when, from time to time, a volume of his turns up in the course of a review like this one. Each time I go back to him though, I'm convinced anew of how rare a bird he is—our authentic Western pastoralist. Unlike the land though, Stafford's words are never just flat, and are just far enough apart to make for an effect that is unique, as in "Maybe Alone On My Bike":

> I listen, and the mountain lakes
> hear snowflakes come on those winter wings
>
> only the owls are awake to see,
> their radar gaze and furred ears
> alert. In that stillness a meaning shakes;
>
> And I have thought (maybe alone
> on my bike, quaintly on a cold

[11] SMOKE'S WAY, by *William Stafford*. Graywolf Press, Port Townsend, Washington. $6.00. SEGUES: A Correspondence in Poetry, by *William Stafford* and *Marvin Bell*. David Godine. $8.95.

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evening pedaling home) think!—
the splendor of our life, its current unknown
as those mountains, the scene no one sees.

Oh citizens of our great amnesty:
We might have died. We live. Marvels
coast by, great veers and swoops of air
so bright the lamp wavers in tears,
and I hear in the chain a chuckle I like to hear.

I suppose you could say that over the course of many poems the Stafford operation palls, grows too predictable; but looked at up close, those owls with their "radar gaze and furred ears," the quaintness of biking home in the cold and thinking about the sublime, the "great veers and swoops of air" stirred up, and the heard "chuckle" in that chain at the end—together make for a wonderfully realized creation in language. (Stafford at his most relaxed may be experienced in the "correspondence in poetry" he and Marvin Bell have cooperated in, with their clever improvisations from each other's tunes—their poems alternating with each other throughout a volume recently published by David Godine.)

The first fifteen poems from Charles Tomlinson's new book are about visiting New York City, and are a delight.[12] Manhattan by air, the World Trade Center, Madison Avenue, Verdi Square, and Hero Sandwiches are among the sights enjoyed. These are poems which no New Yorker would have thought to write, and they present their materials so as to make them fresh glimpses into the usual:

We walk up Madison. It is the end
Of a winter afternoon: the mist
Has cancelled out the reaches of the vista
As the rivers (we cannot see them)
Assert their right to the island they enclose.
So much of the surrounding, the unseen—
The homelessness beyond the mist-lopped towers—
Presses upon us at this hour:
We savour the wine of the solitude of spaces
In the same instant as we choose the street
That seems like a home returned to, grown
Suddenly festive as we enter it
With the odour of chestnuts on the corner braziers.
"On Madison"

There is a fine calmness and inevitability about Tomlinson's lines which make no attempt to "work" on the reader, concerned as they

[12] NOTES FROM NEW YORK, by *Charles Tomlinson*. Oxford University Press. £4.50. TRANSLATIONS, by *Charles Tomlinson*. *Oxford University Press*. *$16.95*.

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are with, in Pound's phrase, the dignity of sheer presentation. But there is often wit in these quiet perceptions: "To cross a ferry that is no longer there,/The eye must pilot you to the farther shore," would surely be the way to begin "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" if you were to rewrite such a poem, as Tomlinson has. "In Verdi Square" does charming things with that patch of turf known not so long ago as Needle Park and featured, before that, in Bellow's *Seize the Day*:

> A minute garden
> you must not enter
> and whose birds (there are notices)
> you are forbidden to feed:
>
> Verdi surveys it all
> stone cloak on arm
> as if about to quit
> his pigeoned pedestal:
>
> without coming down
> he knows perfectly well
> which operas are in town . . .

and it goes on to bring off other nice effects, especially having to do with the square's presidor. It may be just my lack of imagination, but Tomlinson's poem made me think, for the first time, of Verdi Square in connection with—of all people—Verdi.

The poems in the later part of the volume are English in setting and more familiar as the sort of expertly practiced thing this veteran writer turns out, beginning a poem, "High Summer," with a driven syntax and expressive continuity:

> Buzzards bring out their young one
> Circling, show it the map of woods,
> The fields of prey, drive at it
> Diving it downwards and away, then
> Let it rise to take up space
> Under its wings, their incessantly insisting
> Note teaching it what kingdom
> It is the prince of, crying it awake to things . . .

The later poems seemed less memorable and relaxed than the New York ones. But the volume reminds us how much we take Tomlinson's art for granted. (Oxford has also brought out an attractive volume of his translations, of which worth special note are the ones he did, with Henry Gifford, of Fyodor Tyutchev.)

There are of course many reasons to be grateful for Donald Davie's continuing presence, but after reading the most recent poems

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in his volume of collected poems from the years since 1970[13] (when the earlier *Collected Poems* was published) I decided that one of the reasons was that he rhymed. Rhyme, so conspicuously absent in the volumes considered here, is present in Davie's late poem "Artifex in Extremis," which begins with "Let him rehearse the gifts reserved for age/Much as the poet Eliot did" and goes on to explore the consciousness of a dying artist. This exploration is given strength and shape by its rhymes, as in these few lines:

> There was once,
> Torturing to remember, in that steep
> Slope off to nowhere, stamping-ground and stance,
> Foothold, some hard earth under. He discerns
> Still many a cherished, hard-earned eminence
> Loom from his past, on all of which by turns
> He took his stand. No need to specify.
> There is not one of them that now he spurns;
> On all that ring of hills his drowsing eye
> Sees his young self still model rectitude
> Erect and uncertain. Clear against the sky
> Above his drug-dimmed but still savage mood,
> Seen but by him, the things that he has held by
> Unchangeably enforce his solitude.

The new poems from *The Battered Wife* (1982) include, notably, the title poem, "Screech Owl," "Having No Ear," "Siloam," "Three Beyond," and "Two From Ireland," in the last of which the older poet looks back on his younger self, once a don at Trinity College, Dublin. Now, returning in 1977 to the country of the "troubles," he finds himself oddly charmed:

> But, dear friends, I could weep.
> Is it the bombs have made
> Old lesions knit, old chills
> Warm, and old ghosts be laid?

As always, critical of England, Davie finds Ireland

> Twenty-five years at least
> Higher up the slope
> That England plunges down:
> That much ground for hope.

[13] COLLECTED POEMS 1970–1983, by *Donald Davie*. University of Notre Dame Press. $14.95.

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Easy pronouncements from
  The stranger, as he leaves!
The truth is, he was home
  —Or so he half-believes.

As always, to read this poet is to experience intelligence, control, and a quotient of obscurity; but, as in the little poem quoted from above, also a lyric of song. The title of one of these poems, "Having No Ear," is about listening to music. But Davie's ear is in his poetry.

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DANA GIOIA

The Sense of the Sleight-of-Hand Man

WALLACE STEVENS HAS LONG BEEN THE MOST ENIGMATIC of major twentieth-century American poets. Neither his life nor his work fits any familiar pattern, and sometimes they both seem cunningly calculated to defy any comfortable definition. The more one sought Stevens the whole man the more assuredly one found either of his two fragmentary personae—the stolid burgher or the playful aesthete. Few poets ever wrote so much and betrayed so little about their personal lives. And strangely the same sensibility which created a brilliantly idiosyncratic and unmistakably individual style was also drawn exclusively to abstract and universal themes.

One wonders if it wasn't a conscious decision on Stevens' part to exclude his active life from his imaginative one, as if he feared risking his daily world by putting it too explicitly into his poetry. Only in a few late poems does one sense him trying to assimilate both parts of his life. In contrast one could read all of the early *Harmonium* and have no idea about the man behind the poetry—where he lived, whether he was young or old, single or married, settled or peripatetic, how he made his living, what he was like in daily life. Not that such matters determine the quality of the poetry, but one cannot help noticing their conspicuous absence. Readers are not angels, and they wonder about the human figures who create the books they read.

Nor did the little that was publicly known about Stevens' life help clarify the mystery. To learn that the author of the most flamboyant book of American poetry was a middle-aged insurance man in Hartford only added to the confusion. Here one knows Stevens deliberately created an unassailably proper image both to protect himself professionally within the Hartford insurance world and to deflect the pressures of a literary reputation. By the time he achieved literary fame in his sixties it no longer really mattered to him. It was an occasional luxury to be enjoyed sparingly. Moreover, by then he realized the importance privacy played in his inner life and knew that this solitude must be maintained at all costs. He avoided all publicity about his personal life, turning down offers for self-promotion many of his contemporaries would have killed for. He provided the public with a tantalizingly vague general image—the vice-president in the steel-grey suit—and carefully withheld any oth-

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er details. This situation proved too tempting for some of his readers who like Delmore Schwartz made up anecdotes about the man behind the poems. But despite creative writing from an occasional critic, Stevens' strategy worked magnificently. The literary establishment was very willing to treat him as a myth rather than a man, and even thirty years after his death when (at least in the academy) he was treated as the most significant American poet of the century and his books were elevated to the status of sacred texts for the learned to elucidate, almost nothing substantial was known about the life he led while writing those works. Like the accomplished sleight-of-hand man in one of his titles, he had masterfully made himself disappear.

But no one disappears without a trace, at least no one as amazing as Wallace Stevens, and now through the remarkable research of Peter Brazeau the first credible portrait of this elusive poet has been written. In 1975, twenty years after Stevens' death, Brazeau began searching out and interviewing everyone who had known Stevens—poets, insurance men, lawyers, professors, neighbors, relatives, editors. Brazeau found Stevens' office valet, his maid, the manager of his club, his secretary, even his confessor, people in short who saw Stevens in every aspect of his life sometimes on a daily basis for years. (It is curious how these mundane acquaintences despite the frequent awkwardness and banality of their language usually provide more vivid and convincing portraits than the poet's more illustrious literary friends, who often reminisce more tellingly about themselves than about Stevens.) Brazeau arranged this material thematically in *Parts of a World: Wallace Stevens Remembered,*[1] an oral biography, in which the exact words of his sources are quoted. What emerges from this mosaic is one of the most carefully detailed portraits of a poet ever assembled.

Brazeau's book, however, does not qualify as a true biography. That book is yet to be written. While Brazeau presents an unexpected wealth of material, he does not arrange it in a consistently sequential manner (though his thematic arrangement does have a subtle dramatic quality). Nor does the book survey all of Stevens' life. It literally begins *nel mezzo del cammin* in the poet's thirty-sixth year as he made the difficult decision to leave New York for Hartford. Stevens' youth has been largely lost. Brazeau could find no one living who knew Stevens before his move to Connecticut, and so perforce *Parts of a World* became a chronicle of the poet's Hartford years. Within these limits, however, Brazeau suceeds admirably in providing a rich portrait of Stevens and his daily world. There is nothing like it in all the voluminous literature written on Stevens.

Parts of a World is not a perfect book by any means. Like any oral

[1] PARTS OF A WORLD: Wallace Stevens Remembered, by *Peter Brazeau.* Random House. $19.95.

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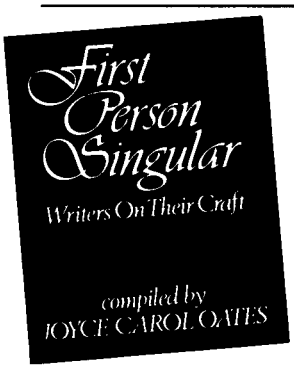

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biography, it is frustrating to read at long stretches. One longs for the author to have shaped the material into an extended, balanced narrative rather than the asymmetrical crazy quilt of separate interviews. Brazeau is a careful editor, but even he cannot eliminate all the repetition and circumlocution of his sources. Sometimes too his zeal for reportorial accuracy leaves in the false starts, vague focus, and non-sequiturs of the actual interviews. While this method heightens the documentary air of the book, I for one would not have minded a more liberal editorial hand from time to time.

But these small reservations do not diminish this book's status as a remarkable act of creative scholarship. While many critics have been turning out marginal studies of Stevens' poetry, Brazeau has assembled one of the few permanently indispensable books on the poet. *Parts of a World* fills an enormous gap in our understanding of Stevens, and it provides the first real foundation for all subsequent biographies. *Parts of a World* also stands as an important act of conservation. Had not Brazeau spent nine years gathering this information, who would have? Most of it would have been irretrievably lost. I noted in reading the appendix that several of the people interviewed have already died. One wishes that more academics showed Brazeau's imagination and resourcefulness in attempting significant projects off the beaten track of literary scholarship.

Brazeau's book also illuminates what in addition to the dual career in business and poetry will probably eventually become the three central issues in Stevens' biography, i.e. his unhappy marriage, his move from New York to Hartford, and his deathbed conversion to Catholicism. The strain in Stevens' marriage has long been known. Indeed it is one of the few biographical facts which could be surmised from the poetry. That so prolific and effusive a poet could have written so much and so rigorously excluded his wife's presence speaks "of the woe that is in marriage." How strange to come upon these lines prefacing "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" and realize they were written not to Stevens' wife but to the aesthete, Henry Church:

> And for what, except for you, do I feel love?
> Do I press the extremest book of the wisest man
> Close to me, hidden in me day and night?

Brazeau's book gives the first full outline of Stevens' courtship and marriage, but even here the essential mystery behind its unhappiness remains. In June 1904, having just completed the New York Bar exams, the twenty-five year old Stevens returned to Reading, Pennsylvania, to spend the summer with his parents before beginning his law practice. Here he met Elsie Kachel, an eighteen-year-old salesgirl with a grammer school education who was reportedly "the prettiest girl in Reading." The reaction of Stevens' respectable

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father to this girl "from the wrong side of town" was not hard to predict, and long before Stevens' marriage to Elsie five years later, the poet had cut off relations with his father and most of the family.

Whatever their other differences, Mr. and Mrs. Stevens shared a great discretion, and one will never know just how or when their romantic infatuation turned into the joyless stalemate of later years when the couple lived in separate sections of the house. Most likely there was no sudden collapse of affection but just the gradual revelation of how incompatible the domineering, intellectual and expansive Stevens was with the shy, nervous, and unliterary Elsie. Whereas Stevens emerges from Brazeau's pages a fully-fleshed credible individual, Mrs. Stevens remains a shadowy figure. The reader gets many glimpses of her often eccentric behavior, but no real sense of her interior life.

A generic danger of oral biographies is that they can easily degenerate into gossip, but in the case of Mrs. Stevens, Brazeau's book has almost no choice. There is little trustworthy information about her since Stevens allowed virtually no one into his house, and he always attended literary and business social events by himself. Therefore, much of what is reported about Mrs. Stevens in Brazeau's book is only surmise. She was widely considered by her neighbors to be a little crazy, and the state of Stevens' marriage was the butt of many jokes at the office. Local kids referred to her as "the witch." And yet the few people who met the retiring, dowdy Mrs. Stevens disagree. To some she seemed quiet but gracious, to others eccentric to the point of insanity. Perhaps the most convincing portrait comes from a former maid who depicts her as a serious, demanding, and inflexible woman. "She was just not a happy person, and she didn't try to make other people happy either."

Brazeau also provides the first real account of Stevens' early legal career and the professional crises of 1916 which forced him to leave his belovedly cosmopolitan New York for provincial Hartford. Between finishing law school in 1903 and being fired from the bankrupt New England Equitable Insurance Company in 1916, Stevens had drifted through five law firms and four insurance companies (if one counts mergers). This is hardly the career path of a successful lawyer. One has the sense that the distractions of Manhattan may have undermined Stevens' concentration. Even his choice of surety bonds as his specialization, one of the dullest corners in all jurisprudens, did not provide him with job security. Now jobless at thirty-six, the eminently practical Stevens must have realized that he had to concentrate on his career as never before. Obtaining a job through an ex-colleague at the newly-formed Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company, Stevens reluctantly left New York for Hartford, a move of great personal and artistic significance for the poet.

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Hartford fed the reclusive, meditative side of Stevens' personality just as New York had developed his bon-vivant, aesthetic side. While he would frequently return to Manhattan for short sprees of jovial socializing in galleries and restaurants, speakeasies and literary salons, it was in Hartford he made his living. In vast anonymous New York he could temporarily play the dandy, but in smaller Hartford he was a key Vice-President in one of the town's largest companies. He never trusted Hartford to accept him as both a poet and a businessman. Though, contrary to legend, Stevens did not hide his literary career from his office associates, he actively discouraged an interest in it. He answered their references to his poetry with rude stares, enigmatic comments or modest dismissals. Likewise, he refused to read his poetry locally, would not deliver lectures in Hartford he had given in other cities, and remained aloof from the town's not inconsiderable artistic life. In Hartford he wanted to be known only as an insurance executive. Biographical interpretations of literature are still out of favor—and rightfully so for real criticism. But book reviewers are allowed to speculate in undisciplined ways. Consequently one wonders if Stevens' demi-exile to Hartford was not one of the major factors shaping his development as a poet. Would his poetry have taken the same course of development, from the brilliant sensuousness of his early pieces in *Harmonium* to the austere intellectuality of "The Rock," had he remained in the convivial artistic circles of New York?

The most startling new information published in Brazeau's book is the account of Stevens' deathbed conversion to Catholicism. (News of his baptism had previously been suppressed by the local archbishop, who feared that it would harm the reputation of Catholic hospitals among non-Catholics.) Whether this act was a denial or vindication of Stevens' artistic credo will surely be one of the major issues in any comprehensive criticism of his *oeuvre*. His request for baptism was not an act which can be lightly dismissed. On one subject all of Brazeau's ninety informants agree—i.e., Stevens was not a man to make commitments lightly. Nor were his final months marked by emotional or intellectual weakness. As Manning Heard, later President of Hartford Accident and Indemnity, said, "Of all the individuals I've seen go through this, he was the most capable in knowing how to die." In his final bout with stomach cancer Stevens maintained a stoic calm and intellectual lucidity worthy of his old philosopher in Rome as "The human end in the spirit's greatest reach,/The extreme of the known in the presence of the extreme/ Of the unknown."

Nor was his conversion unprefigured in his life and work. Like his hero Santayana, Stevens had used Christian concepts throughout his work, however agnostic his articulated philosophy seemed. Likewise, unknown to all but a few of his closest friends, for years

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Stevens had often spent part of his seemingly sybaritic visits to New York meditating in churches, usually St. Patrick's Cathedral.

The fun of reading *Parts of the World* comes from the hundreds of anecdotes and observations throughout the book: old-school Stevens wearing a crimson feather in his cap at the Harvard/Yale game; philistine Stevens attending wrestling matches with the "boys" from the office; drunken Stevens dancing a polka with a colleague from work; imperious Stevens commanding a junior executive to drive him down to the New York World's Fair for lunch; sophomoric Stevens roaring with laughter over silly jokes. One could go on listing anecdotes for pages, as indeed most of Brazeau's reviewers already have, but there is at least one deeper observation which has eluded them, the strength of Stevens' character. Unexpectedly, the Stevens that emerges from these pages is not unlike the protagonists of one of his own later poems—a strong philosophic man of taste and imagination, a person who lives in his time and place without being of it. To see Stevens' cantankerous reclusivity and aloofness merely as eccentricities misses the point. They were also expressions of his values. In lonely unliterary Hartford, Stevens learned that the private act of writing was important, not the public life of the writer. He cared for literary politics no more than office politics, and just as he deliberately passed up promotions that could have led him to the Presidency of Hartford Accident and Indemnity, he continualiy turned down other opportunities that would have made him a literary celebrity. Immune to vanity, he would not let either *Life* or *The New Yorker* do profiles on him (honors his friend, William Carlos Williams, actively courted). Instead he lived in Hartford like "a veritable monk," as Dr. Williams complained. And though Williams did not intend that epithet as a compliment, one sees many of the ancient monastic virtues in Stevens—the love of solitude and meditation, the steadfast dedication to one's quest for enlightenment, and paradoxically for so successful a businessman, a distance from the City of Man. American poetry could do much worse in selecting a patron saint.

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IN THIS ISSUE:

A major problem with discussions in and about the women's movement has been that they are overwhelmingly subject to the pressures of immediacy. They always seem likely to take off toward one extreme or another, as if *this* were the eternal situation. Or, they are burdened with all the recent cliches of thought and language, so that however much one tries, the discussion can't break out of the current view. In this sense, the women's movement has definitely suffered from a dearth of historical perspective. (At its worst, this takes the form of rejecting all works of art that were created before the present period of enlightenment.) This narrowness of vision has been further exacerbated by a clannishness of gender—the assumption being that men have relatively little to say that's of use to modern women.

—Wendy Lesser, "Even-Handed Oddness," p. 209

God must be much more interesting than is generally supposed: not only unshockable—having seen it all—but a super-administrator, the best, the almost invisible kind, the most insightful psychiatrist, and the most humorous sex-therapist. Even these images won't do. Yes—he can't be inferior to any human being we've known or ever imagined; he couldn't be without any of the best human characteristics he and we have invented together; but the most difficult thing about him is that he transcends all these knowns and unknowns. Anything we can think about him is only an idol of the mind, a pebble with legs and a navel on the shore: a momentary existence. Not tomorrow, but the next second, he must elude us. He's a dark one. After we think we've glimpsed him, we have to look for him somewhere else, perhaps in the next contradictory experience.

—Herbert Lomas, "Defamiliarizing God," p. 321

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